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Struggling to Compete: Community-Based Research on Agrarian Change in the Caribbean

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Graduate Program in Geography
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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Struggling to Compete:
Community-Based Research on Agrarian Change in the Caribbean

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Karen A. Ross

Graduate Program in Geography

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Many countries in the Global South have agricultural landscapes and economies that are heavily dependent upon a small range of agro-exports, such as bananas. Tropical agro-exports have long earned low prices in international markets, which led to a number of historical policy responses geared towards stabilizing export prices and volumes. However, since the 1990s these have been overwhelmed by trade liberalization, intensifying pressures to lower costs of production and exacerbating the enduring challenges associated with tropical agro-export commodity dependence.

This research seeks to understand these contemporary challenges through immersed fieldwork in rural communities. Through interviews with small farmers, farm workers, managers, owners, and government and corporate officials (n=200), it explores and compares different responses to the demise of preferential market access for bananas in two countries where dependence rests on very different productive systems: Dominica, where small farmers predominate, and Belize, where plantations prevail.

In Dominica, banana production has drastically declined in the wake of trade liberalization, and most small farmers have entered a Fairtrade market with limited success. In marked contrast, banana production in Belize has continued rising, in large measure because plantations have entered a high-value niche market. However, this export growth depends upon a steady labour force which plantations are struggling to reproduce, a dynamic that is threatening to undermine the basis of this new niche. These divergent case studies problematize the impacts of trade liberalization in agriculture, and question the merits of agrarian development focused on commodity exports into the future.

While this dissertation was inspired by a concern about the imbalances of the global food economy, another significant trajectory emerged through data collection: the gendered nature – and risks – of immersed fieldwork, and the void in the literature on issues of sexual violence in the field. Both conceptions and practices in feminist methodologies about reducing distance and balancing power in the field need to take into account the gendered risks of sexual violence. Conversations about sexual violence in fieldwork are needed to better prepare researchers, and are central to challenging entrenched perceptions of what is ‘rigorous’ research and the latent male archetype of the ‘ideal’ researcher.

Key words: Agrarian Change, Agrarian Political Economy, Rural Development,
Caribbean, Tropical Commodities, Fair Trade, Immersed Research, Feminist
Methodologies, Gendered Risks, Sexual Violence

Co-Authorship Statement

Chapter 3 entitled “A precarious dependence: liberalization and agrarian change in the Belizean banana belt”, is a co-authored paper with Tony Weis.

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myself beyond all limits. It is from you and some of your opposing characteristics that I have learned how to be reflective while also staying forward thinking, how to be adaptable while acknowledging my limits, and how to use many different tools to find peace and ease in almost any situation. It's the life and loss of my sister and your daughter that has taught me how to feel genuine empathy, and I have no doubt that one of the outcomes of our tragedy is that I am a much more compassionate person, and hold a great desire to make meaningful relationships with people to share their simple joys and maybe even the pain of their hard tragedies. I have no doubt that this desire to connect in deeply resonant ways based on a common humanity motivated my research pursuits and maybe even helped me in the field, and it will continue to inspire my path ahead. Thank you, for supporting me through this journey and for continuing to be such phenomenal role models as I move forward.

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1. Introduction: Problems of tropical commodity dependence and agricultural trade liberalization

1.1. Contextualizing the Problem

Tropical commodity dependence and agricultural trade liberalization

Many countries of the Global South continue to be heavily dependent upon a narrow base of agricultural exports, such as sugar, cotton, coffee, palm oil, cocoa, groundnuts, and bananas, which tend to occupy large areas of the best arable lands (Thurow and Kilman 2009). In addition to frequent distributional inequalities, narrow commodity dependence has for decades been characterized by low prices and falling terms of trade (vis-à-vis more diverse bundles of imports), which has stifled the extent of poverty reduction in many developing countries (Robbins 2003).

The problems of commodity dependence and declining terms of trade were met with a number of policy responses in the 1970s. Among the most notable of these was the establishment of “partnerships for development through trade”, in which some industrialized countries made long-term commitments to provide market access and guarantee stable prices for certain tropical commodities, coupled with development assistance for industry and social development. The Lomé Agreement (discussed further below), was the most prominent example of such a “development partnership”.

The assurance of preferential markets was not without problems and debates. For instance, critics stressed their role perpetuating, and in some instances deepening commodity dependence (Raynolds 1999). They were also seen to encourage unequal opportunities within and between exporting countries, since only some products and producers benefitted from higher value markets, and since some developing countries were privileged over others (Slocum 2006). Yet in spite of justified criticisms,

preferential trade agreements were nevertheless widely considered to be relatively beneficial to the export sectors for participating countries, such as those of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), for providing a significant degree of price and volume stability and helping to foster long-term economic growth (Slocum 2006; Grossman 1998).

By the 1980s, the wider political economic context that had given rise to development policies such as coordinated supply management and preferential markets came to be increasingly overwhelmed by neoliberal development policies (Harvey 2008). One of the key components of neoliberal development prescriptions is trade liberalization, which was enforced bilaterally through World Bank and IMF-led Structural Adjustment Programs since the 1980s, and multilaterally through the World Trade Organization (WTO) following its establishment in 1995. The basic logic was to compel developing countries to open national borders to the most competitive goods and services, and to concentrate investment and production in areas where they hold a comparative advantage (Clapp and Cohen 2009). These policies came with promises that unfettered market forces and increased international trade would compel producers to become more efficient in order to compete, and that this would in turn drive development. In practice, however, outcomes have been very uneven.

Throughout the Global South, neoliberal policy prescriptions encouraged the expansion of export production and the liberalization of domestic markets (Kay 2011a). For many countries, these policies led to worsening agro-trade deficits, in part because several nations were expanding production in similar crops, contributing to flooded markets and a cyclical process in which prices drop, producers are forced to produce more for the same earnings, and surpluses put further pressure on prices and in turn on

land and labour (McMichael 2009a; Weis 2007a). The domestic inequalities frequently associated with large-scale agro-export production are compounded by unequal external relations, as large TNCs tend to accumulate most of the value within commodity chains, possessing the flexibility to source from multiple nations and pit one against the next in order to access the lowest cost production. For consumers in the North, the systemic under-valuation of tropical agro-exports can be seen in almost any supermarket today (Fridell 2007; Robbins 2003).

In short, the problems associated with agro-export dependence have tended to get worse not better for many developing countries following trade liberalization, and this predicament raises difficult questions about the future of agrarian livelihoods and the role of agriculture in national development (Kay 2011b). These macro-scale processes are leading to differentiated outcomes at the local level, an exploration of which lies at the heart of this dissertation.

Dismantling the 'development through trade' era

A variety of responses to declining terms of trade emerged in the 1970s, and the Lomé Agreement was a prominent example of a North-South preferential trading partnership. The Lomé Agreement established a trading system that was rooted in the colonial ties between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of 79 member states, and the European Community (EC) (later the European Union, EU) (Josling and Taylor 2003). Initiated in 1975, the Lomé Agreement granted non-reciprocal trade preferences to ACP countries for tropical agro-exports into EC markets, with the ostensible goal of promoting “development through trade”, while making commitments to development assistance (Myers 2004). Although ACP countries benefited from both

trade (i.e. stabilized export earnings) and aid (i.e. support for social and economic development) commitments, these protected markets did not encourage diversification in productive sectors beyond dependence on a narrow range of agro-exports (Weis 2007b; Slocum 2006). This dependence was suddenly destabilized in the 1990s when the WTO ruled that preferential markets were an unfair trade practice that had to be dismantled, a decision that was confirmed upon EU appeal (Anania 2008; Myers 2004).

The WTO ruling resulted in the progressive phasing out of ACP trade-preferences in EU markets, through a series of tariff reductions on non-ACP exports and the elimination of guaranteed ACP-wide quotas in 2008 (Anania 2008). Thus, ACP exports are now not only in competition with more cost-efficient producers in non-ACP countries, but are also in direct competition with one another for access to markets that had for decades been stable and jointly negotiated. Today, in contrast to the historic pattern and form of ACP negotiations, new approaches resemble a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy which threatens the cohesion of the ACP group (Girvan 2013; Brewster 2008), and cast into serious doubt the future of North-South “development through trade” partnerships which have been displaced by various free-trade agreements (FTAs).

The responses to trade liberalization that have followed have been diverse and highly uneven. In some instances, competitive pressures have fostered more cost-efficient agro-export production, whereas other producers have lost out and been forced to search for alternatives. The intense discipline of this restructuring entails dramatic changes, as producers must find ways of competing on a much wider playing field. In simple neoliberal terms, the collapse of Dominica’s banana exports reflects a failure to compete, and the export growth of the Belizean banana industry reflects a clear success in

developing new efficiencies. However, there are much more complex stories that underlie these divergent trajectories, and one of the fundamental goals of this thesis was to unpack them.

Beyond preferences: Divergent responses in Banana Production

Bananas are the largest traded fruit by volume in the world, and typify tropical agro-export commodities in that the vast majority of global trade is dominated by large TNCs and there has been a long-term decline in real earnings for producing countries (Millstone and Lang 2008; Moberg 2008; Robbins 2003). Although banana production in ACP countries represents only a small percentage of the total volume of global banana production, bananas are an important agro-export and source of foreign exchange earnings in a number of ACP countries, especially in parts of the CARICOM (Lyon and Moberg 2010; Moberg 2008).

My interests in the enduring problems associated with commodity dependence coupled with the context of liberalization following the demise of the preferential EU-ACP market led me to focus my research in two small Caribbean countries, Dominica and Belize. In particular, I was interested in the fact that they were both highly dependent upon bananas but with very different productive bases and very different responses to the decline of preferential trade.

Dominica is one of three small CARICOM countries (along with St Vincent and St Lucia) whose economy was utterly tied to banana exporting under the EU-ACP preferential trade regime (Slocum 2006; Myers 2004). In Dominica, banana exports were largely based on a relatively equitable smallholder farming system, with most farms island-wide averaging roughly 3 acres, and exports fell sharply during the phase out of

the EU-ACP preferential market from the mid-1990s onwards. In response to their inability to compete in conventional markets, many small farmers in Dominica stopped producing bananas, and many left farming altogether, while those who continued to cultivate bananas increasingly turned to a higher-value alternative network (Fair Trade) amidst declining export volumes to an extent that virtually all of Dominica's banana exports are now certified Fair Trade (Fairtrade Foundation 2012).

Belizean banana production, on the other hand, was rooted in large-scale plantation production that initially took off in the 1970s (Moberg 1997). These banana plantations are clustered together along a flat strip of land known as the 'banana belt', which straddles the Stann Creek and Toledo districts in the South. Since the demise of EU-ACP preferential markets, Belizean banana exports have increased considerably – one of only a few cases across the ACP where such an outcome has occurred – with plantations expanding in scale and intensifying production in a number of ways.

Research questions

At the broadest level, my research was motivated by a desire to explore how social relations are being transformed by the same broad processes in two very different agro-export dependent contexts. This motivation was in turn guided by the following three questions:

- How is the competitive restructuring of banana exporting affecting the relations of production on small farms and plantations in the Caribbean?
- How are small farmers and farm workers, managers and plantation owners interpreting and responding to this increasingly competitive context?
- How do small farmers and farm workers envision alternatives, and how does this

relate to their interpretations of and responses to the contemporary restructuring? These questions gave my project focus, and helped to identify the central themes and patterns I focused on. However, in the course of this research I also wanted to maintain flexibility to examine the substantive diversity of experiences, from the struggles of individual small farmers and their organizations in Dominica, to workers responses to the fragmentary and insecure conditions of labour on Belizean plantations.

Another important aspect of the flexibility of my approach was how my field research experiences and, the subsequent recognition of the weakness of the literature on this topic, led me to pursue a contribution that I could not initially anticipate. In pursuing this, I was essentially guided by a two-part question:

- How do gendered risks affect the practice of immersed research, and how does the relative silence about these risks affect the conceptualization of immersed research methods and in turn, the ways we as academics judge ourselves and our own research, and other researchers and their research?

1.2. Research Design and Methods

Understanding agrarian change through immersed research

This research is broadly motivated by the field of agrarian political economy, in the sense that it attempts to explore the differentiated social outcomes of agrarian change (Bernstein 2010). While recognizing that agrarian change must be understood at multiple scales, including national level policy change and international level trade relations, the fundamental objective here was to understand differentiated outcomes on the ground by centring the insights and responses of local actors. It also reflects my belief that development problems are fundamentally embedded in unequal control over land,

labour, and surpluses (Robbins 2004; Blaikie 1999; Grossman 1998).

Thus, while my research prioritized a detailed analysis of the changes unfolding on plantations and small farms, and placed much emphasis on the agency and interpretation of participants, I was also highly conscious of the fact that these have to be considered in the context of wider political economic forces, such as the power relations within banana commodity chains (e.g. vertical integration, corporate supervision) and the pressures of global competitiveness. With respect to the latter, the shared macro-economic context (the end of preferential trade relations with the EU and increased market liberalization) is especially important, but it does not alone determine the nature of changes unfolding on the ground. By focusing on the interrelationships between local changes and wider structural dynamics, empirical “on the ground” research can add valuable nuance to generalizations about global market integration. Trade liberalization might be a pervasive prescription, but this does not mean that responses to it are playing out in precisely the same ways everywhere, and immersed research can help to illuminate both the differentiated nature of outcomes and some of the seams through which they are being challenged (Tsing 2005).

Changes to banana production in both Dominica and Belize clearly demand attention to changes in both national-level policies and multilateral trade regulation. To this end, at the national level, I made use of some planning and budgetary documents, and conducted interviews with relevant government officials. This revealed (as will be elaborated in Chapter 2) significant state cutbacks from most agricultural supports, and a range of organizations emerging to take greater control over the direction of the industry, such as WINFA (Windward Island Fair Trade Association) in Dominica, and the BGA

(Banana Growers Association) and the Irish-based TNC Fyffes in Belize. In response, I also conducted interviews with key representatives of these organizations, and made use of many of their documents, especially those concerning policies, procedures, budgets, contracts and future planning.

While these interviews and sources were crucial in helping to better understand changes unfolding at the national and international scales, the heart of this research lies in the semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation with small farmers in Dominica and farm workers, managers, and plantation owners in Belize.¹ This research focussed on such things as: land use practices; marketing strategies; working conditions; future plans; and other perspectives on key changes since the late 1990s when Dominica's banana exports began to collapse and Belize's export surge began.

All of my interviews relied on open-ended questions, in an attempt to facilitate informal conversations, rambling responses, and rich description. The flexibility of this approach allowed me to modify the order and content of my questions on the fly, and redirect the flow of conversations in productive ways, which often drew responses that uncovered new themes and the most interesting data. I transcribed all my interviews in the field because this process of ongoing transcription (complemented by any additional notes) not only allowed me to clearly remember the context and nuances of the interviews but also helped me with early insights on key themes for my data analysis, as I used both etic and emic categories to code my transcripts (Richardson 2004).

Participant observation was another important aspect of my field research,

¹ All conditions mandated by the University ethics board were followed, especially concerning issues of confidentiality. No names or identifying traits were accorded to participants in this dissertation and its publications. I tried hard to balance the voices used in the text and include multiple perspectives, but inevitably there are limits to this.

because it helped me become familiar with the places I was working in and provided insight on the accessibility, size, and diversity of my target population (Van Maanen 2004). It was a key means through which I learned cultural norms and local ways of phrasing the key issues I was concerned with, which helped to strengthen the interview process (Katz 1994). Participant observation occurred throughout the research in various settings, from on-farm work to village life to bus rides, and it provided a rich source of field notes, broadened and highlighted potential silences in interview data, and expanded on relations beyond the interview setting (Miles and Crush 1993). Although my perspective, like any researcher, will always be biased to some extent by my gender, race, nationality, class, and life history (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), being immersed in the communities helped reduce both my own prohibitive feelings as an outsider, and probably served to decrease the perception of me as ‘Other’. I have no doubt that my immersion in the communities and my ability to speak to the vast majority of participants in their first language (English and French in Dominica, and English and Spanish in Belize) served to reduce some of the power dynamics between researcher and researched, helped to establish trust and often very enthusiastic participation, and ultimately allowed me to collect rich data.

However, as I indicated in the previous section, immersion as a solitary woman researcher also presented a series of problems, which ranged from minor inconveniences to severe threats of sexual violence. As time went on, I developed a variety of adaptive strategies to protect myself from the various risks I faced, and these experiences led me to explore the gendered context of research and integrate it into this dissertation (Chapter 4). For now, suffice to say that the threats from gendered violence often restricted my

movements and abilities to collect data in all of the ways that I had originally outlined in my proposal. The biggest impacts were on my choice of study sites (particularly in Dominica), my shortened length of stay in Belize, and the fact that wherever possible I tried not to conduct interviews alone. In Dominica, agricultural extension officers travelled with me to my participants, which served not only to increase my sense of safety but also increased my access to participants. In Belize, I occasionally had an assistant to translate from Mayan languages, and often conducted interviews in very public places with lots of women and children who would sometimes join the conversations. I am aware that participants probably had varied perceptions of both myself and the people I was accompanied by, and that this may have affected what they said (Rose 1997). But I am also very confident that in spite of my altered plans and adaptive strategies, I was still able to pursue rigorous research and reach thematic saturation. And as I develop more fully in Chapter 4, it is impossible to know in advance which research context and strategy will draw out the most ‘complete’ data.

Field research experiences

My field research in Dominica occurred over a three-and-a-half month period in 2009, during which time I conducted 77 interviews. I purposively sampled participants, aided by a few trusted extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. My primary goal in this was to locate farmers who had produced bananas in the 1990s and before, which included some who had gotten out of banana production since the end of preferential trade. The reason I implemented the sample boundary of “still-active farmers” was to contain the focus of the inquiry to a manageable scope, because many Dominicans stopped farming following the collapse of preferential markets in the EU and to track the

diversity of non-farming responses (e.g. migration, increasing dependence on remittances, shifts to other jobs, etc.) would have led me to a different study than that from my interest in agrarian change. However, a clear picture of farming attrition not only emerged from policy papers and statistics on rural development but also from interviews as participants lamented idle lands and dwindling rural communities.

My meetings with farmers were often extended, sometimes involving half-days of labour to increase familiarity, trust, and rapport, and to facilitate the process of participant observation. The semi-structured interviews generally lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. While my participants were most concentrated in the Layou River Valley, their circumstances are broadly representative of Dominica as a whole, as Dominica is a small island (32 square miles) with a population of just over 60,000, and there is little variation in banana production and land tenancy, with the sole exception of the relatively small protected Carib Territory.²

My immersion in the Belizean ‘banana belt’ was complicated by the fact that workers there live in compounds that are contained within the plantations themselves, as well as in small villages between farms, and for safety reasons it was impossible for me to live in these locations. Instead, I lived in a nearby village and commuted to the plantations often with owners or managers, which followed a 3 week scoping study in the region (2 weeks in February 2010 and another week in October 2011). Over a 5 month period in 2012, I conducted 121 interviews with owners, managers and workers (in roughly equal numbers of males and females) during work hours on the plantations and afterwards in the associated compounds and villages.

² Very different conditions prevail there, in terms of indigenous land rights, marketing opportunities, and the nature of production.

Participants were again purposively sampled, as I targeted information-rich cases and used a snowball approach. Although I conducted more interviews with workers because there are many more of them, I typically had longer interviews and more extensive observation with managers and owners. I was not allowed access to 40 percent of the plantations in the region because of various ongoing legal battles, but in some instances I was able to talk to some workers off-site. Labour conditions and management strategies do differ, to some extent, from plantation to plantation based on the size of the landholding, the demands of the owner, and the nature of the owner's investments, but I still feel confident that I was able to gain insights on the variations within the banana belt because of where I had access to, because many owners and managers discussed situations on other farms, and because many workers shared their experience from work at other farms.

Dissertation Outline

My dissertation is in the integrated manuscript style.

The first paper, entitled "Competing Beyond Preferences: The Restructuring of Banana Production in the Caribbean" compares Belize's and Dominica's banana economies, and their different responses to the collapse of the preferential EU market. It argues that Belize's banana export growth in production is based on several cost-cutting tactics that may be undermining its restructuring "success", and that the banana belt region still maintains the lowest socioeconomic development in the nation. The paper continues on with the case in Dominica, to argue that the absorption of Dominica's out-competed small farmers into the Fair Trade market has left producers feeling trapped and option-less. Although this market is touted as just, democratic, empowering, and

transparent, producers are increasingly engaging in “self-exploitation” because the additional Fair Trade price and premium are not covering the extra labour demands of production and rising costs of inputs. The paper concludes by discussing how this cross-country comparison highlights some of the persistent problems of tropical commodity dependence in the context of global market integration, and raises concerns about the role of agriculture in national development in these small Caribbean nations.

The second paper, entitled “A precarious dependence: liberalization and agrarian change in the Belizean Banana Belt,” delves deeper into the complex class relations in the Belizean plantations, and how these are evolving in the context of liberalization and the new higher-value export niche planters have been able to secure with Fyffes. The paper argues that the growth in export production is resting on very unstable foundations: the quality control that is at the crux of the product’s marketability is increasingly requiring a diligent and committed team, meanwhile the industry is dependent on a low-cost transient and unreliable workforce. This paper brings to light the complex social relations of production that are underlying the contradictory demands of liberalization to reveal how various classes of labour are struggling with the “race to the bottom” and increased corporate manipulation, quality control and standards.

The third paper, entitled “‘No Sir, She Was Not A Fool In The Field’: Gendered Risks and Sexual Violence in Immersed Cross-Cultural Fieldwork” is forthcoming in *The Professional Geographer*, and focusses on immersed methods and gendered violence. The paper first problematizes the silence on the gendered risks and threats of sexual violence in the field. It confronts this weakness in the literature by arguing that this silence has led to limited conceptualizations of how researchers should balance power

and reduce distance in fieldwork, and brings this to light through examples from my own experience of immersed research in the Caribbean. Ultimately, I think the paper's most important contribution is its request to other researchers to expand on this discussion with their own experiences of violence and resilience in the field. I argue that this is imperative in order to continue to move beyond persistent notions of what is defined as "rigorous" research, conceptions which are often still implicitly associated with the archetypal male as "ideal" researcher.

The dissertation concludes by drawing together common themes that emerged across the country case studies as a means of bringing to light the main goal of the dissertation: to reveal the complex ways in which trade liberalization is affecting commodity dependent landscapes and societies. This serves to enliven the discussion that follows on the dissertation's contributions and the ways it may motivate future directions in the field of agrarian political economy. I also expand on my contribution to feminist methodologies, and integrate both the support and feedback I have received from male and female researchers since the acceptance of this paper in *The Professional Geographer*. I use this to expand my discussion on the direction for future research, and I hope that it will also inspire more writing, informal conversations, and action-oriented workshops on the subject of the gendered nature of field research and the experience of sexual violence in the field.

2. Competing Beyond Preferences: The Restructuring of Banana Production in the Caribbean

Abstract

Trade liberalization is intensifying the challenges of rural development across the Global South, affecting livelihoods associated with agricultural commodity export production, from plantation workers to small farmers. The fate of banana exporting in the small Caribbean nations which had come to depend upon it provides a good window for examining these challenges, as considerable dependence was cultivated in an era of protected markets and development assistance, and very different approaches to restructuring have been undertaken. This paper presents a comparative case study of the changes in banana production associated with new market conditions that have occurred in Belize, where plantations prevail, and Dominica, where small farmers dominate. In Belize, plantations have managed to survive and expand production by establishing a contract relationship based on rigorous quality control standards, while the banana production and exports have declined dramatically in Dominica, with the small farmers remaining in bananas now tied to Fair Trade certification. In its ruling to eliminate preferential markets, the World Trade Organization described it as an 'unfair' trade practice. This research reveals a very different picture, showing how divergent attempts to establish new niches in world markets are leading to increasingly uneven outcomes.

2.1 Tropical agro-export dependence and the preferential trade response

Across many parts of the Global South, the dependence on agro-export production has posed enduring questions for rural development (UNCTAD 2013; Robbins 2003). Contemporary patterns of agro-export production have deep roots in the history of colonialism, and were entrenched and in many cases magnified by policy and infrastructural biases towards exporting held by governments in the wake of decolonization. In basic terms, this dependence means that large areas of prime arable land are devoted to the production of a narrow range of crops, often in monoculture plantations (Weis 2007a).

Severe land inequalities that are frequently associated with agro-exporting have constrained the opportunities of many rural people and forced them to seek low paid and insecure work on larger farms, as well as fuelling urban migration (Bernstein 2010). Another aspect of this dependence is that tropical agro-exports have typically earned low and volatile prices on international markets, declining in relation to the wider range of imports that developing countries have come to depend upon. These declining terms of trade are made even more problematic by the fact that many developing countries have become increasingly dependent on imported technologies and manufactured goods but also on key food staples.³

The dependence upon tropical agro-exports like sugar, coffee, tea, cotton, and bananas became increasingly problematic for many developing countries in the 1970s, as

³ This dependence dramatically increased in the process of decolonization, as rising structural grain surpluses forced the United States (and later Europe) to seek expanded export outlets, and led them to subsidize exports to newly independent countries where many governments were eager to receive cheap food with hopes that this would reduce the cost of labour and in turn enhance prospects for increasing industrialization (Friedmann 2009; Friedmann and McMichael 1989).

oversupply in world markets played a major role in sharply declining real prices – a chronic problem that has been called the ‘tropical commodities disaster’ (Robbins 2003). The recognition of how serious a development problem this posed was a major motivation for some global scale policy interventions, including the establishment of organizations to coordinate supply management and the creation of North-South ‘partnerships for development through trade’, in which Northern governments ensured preferential markets for a specified range of Southern exports, with prices and volumes collectively negotiated by groups of countries (Fridell 2007; Friedmann 2005; Robbins 2003).

The biggest case of preferential trade was established by the Lomé Convention in 1976, which was rooted in colonial ties between the European Commission (later Union) (EC/EU) and 79 former colonies that were part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of nations. This agreement guaranteed protected EC/EU markets with stable prices to ACP countries for some of their major commodities, including bananas, along with European development assistance oriented to enhance competitiveness both directly and indirectly, the latter by fostering broader social development in rural communities. While this system did not resolve all the problems of commodity dependence, it did insulate producers and producing countries to some extent from the vagaries of the global market, and brought some marked social benefits in most countries (Fridell 2011; Myers 2004).

Preferential markets were especially significant for some of the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), including the Windward Islands of the eastern Caribbean as well as Belize, where they incubated and then insulated the rise of banana

exporting. Although the Caribbean was the first region of the world to be constructed on the basis of plantation-based agro-exporting, predominantly sugar (Mintz 1985; Beckford 1972), most islands did not possess the prospects for large-scale fruit production due to their small size, rugged landscapes, and limited infrastructure (Fridell 2011; Capplan 2004). Yet although they accounted for a tiny share of world trade in bananas, by the 1980s no region of the world was more dependent upon banana exporting than the Windward Islands in relative terms.

Banana production in the Windward Islands stood in stark contrast with the ‘Banana Republic’ plantations, which have dominated world trade in bananas since its origins in the late 19th century, as production was overwhelmingly based on small-scale farmers working family land (about 3 acres on average in Dominica, for example) and maintaining diverse plots with food crops planted between rows of bananas. Because of the nature of the EU-ACP partnership, relatively equitable landscapes, and well-organized state marketing boards, dependence upon bananas carried many positive connotations in Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent, to an extent they were widely known as ‘Green Gold’ (as pre-ripened bananas are still green at the point of export). For small farmers in these countries, preferential markets ensured stable bi-weekly sales which, over time, significantly augmented farmer’s incomes and enabled most to build concrete houses (a big step from wooden shelters vulnerable to tropical storms), purchase vehicles, and even save up for their children’s post-secondary educations. Further, in addition to this income, European development assistance contributed to investment in physical and social infrastructure like roads, electrification, sanitation, and schools, and

together this enhanced the quality of living in small rural communities (Slocum 2006; Myers 2004; Grossman 1998; Trouillot 1988).

In other Caribbean countries like Belize, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Suriname, banana production was far less equitable than in the Windward Islands. In Belize, national strategies for economic growth supported a small but dominant planter class in the south-central region of the country known as the ‘banana belt’, as well as establishing an approach to migration policies that fostered a relatively subservient labour force (Moberg 1997). While banana exporting in Belize was built upon highly unequal social relations, the conditions of plantation workers generally improved over the course of the EU-ACP system due to the price stability of preferential markets and the accompanying development assistance given to physical and social infrastructure.

Although the EU-ACP system of ‘development through trade’ did bring some improved conditions, it can also be seen to have prolonged a dangerously narrow dependence on commodity exports. This dependence ultimately became more vulnerable in an era of intensifying trade liberalization, which began with the rise of neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s and was institutionalized with the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 (Fridell 2013; Slocum 2006). Concurrent with these changes in trade regulation was the increasing consolidation of power over the global agro-food system by a small number of massive, vertically-integrated TNCs (McMichael 2009; Barndt 2008; Friedmann 2005).

The role of the WTO as a powerful mechanism of trade liberalization (and corporate power) was illustrated clearly in the legal challenge to the EU-ACP system of preferential trade that was dubbed the ‘Banana Wars’ (Myers 2004). The ‘Banana Wars’

began when the US government, along with five leading Latin American banana exporters (urged on with behind-the-scenes lobbying from the ‘Big Three’ US-based TNCs who have dominant positions in the global banana trade: Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte), challenged the legitimacy of EU protectionism for ACP commodities according to the WTO’s laws of liberalization (Myers 2004). The WTO ruled against the EU-ACP and upheld this decision upon appeal, demanding that preferential markets be progressively phased out by 2006.

Although banana exports from over 25 ACP countries only represented 5 percent of all international trade in bananas at the time of the WTO ruling, in a few cases – most notably the Windward Islands – the loss of preferential markets posed major challenges to countries where bananas represented a major share of export earnings (Fridell 2011). As quotas in EU markets were phased out, ACP countries were effectively pitted in competition against one another as well as against much larger and more cost-efficient Latin American producers, whose low costs were owed in no small part to low wage levels and lax environmental standards.

2.2 Neoliberal agricultural restructuring and the rise of Fair Trade networks

Neoliberal economic policies have altered the land, labour and capital intensity of agricultural production, both between and within countries (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009). In general, large-scale farms have the greatest potential for specialization and labour-saving technologies, and appear to be most efficient because they are capable of greater output per worker. To advocates of neoliberal development policies, declining state intervention and trade liberalization ensures that the most cost-efficient commodity producers will have incentives to expand as much as demand allows, maximizing supply

and reducing the prices of commodities on a world scale. From the scale of farms to that of countries, the lesson is to focus attention on competing at what one does best (i.e. where there is a comparative advantage) in order to maximize earnings and be able to purchase more of everything else.

However, this prescription conceals how competition in world agriculture occurs on a highly uneven playing field, which includes the increasing control exerted by transnational corporations (TNCs) throughout commodity chains and the fact that a failure to count many social and environmental costs in the standard definition of efficiency that defines cheapness. Thus, it is made to appear natural that large-scale production will win out and that small farmers – who tend to have more diverse cropping patterns and much greater relative labour inputs than large farms – will struggle to compete amidst cheap prices, and increasingly be displaced and forced to find work on larger farms or in cities (Weis 2010).

One notable response to the imbalances associated with the neoliberal era and the growing corporate control over value and decision-making in the agro-food system has been the rise of Fair Trade networks, though they have much longer roots stretching back to the 1940s and direct exchange relationships established between Northern Church groups and their Southern mission communities. The general aspiration of fair trade is often framed with the notion of empowerment, and the basic hope is that associations of small farmers in the Global South can be more directly connected to networks of conscientious consumers in the North: leading not only to enhanced margins for small farmers but more transparent and democratic decision-making in commodity chains (Barratt Brown 1993).

As Fridell (2010:458) argues, it is important to appreciate that fair trade *networks* also have roots in an informal *movement* that has approached problems of agro-export dependence and potential solutions in a more wide-ranging way. In his words, this broader fair trade movement has recognized the need for “a variety of initiatives headed by Southern governments, international organisations and NGOs with the purpose of using market regulation to protect poor farmers and workers in the South from the vagaries of the international market” (Fridell 2010:458). The North-South partnership forged by the Lomé Convention can be seen to have been a part of this fair trade movement, along with such things as international commodity agreements and price stabilisation schemes, commodity producer alliances (to control supply), and appeals for a UN-governed corporate code of conduct.

Contemporary fair trade networks can therefore be seen to exist both “within and against” the competitive pressures of neoliberal globalization, as they are attempting to present a challenge to the dominant ways that this trade is controlled and regulated while also possessing the potential to grow in the context of increasing market integration and trade (Jaffee 2007; Fridell 2004). In thinking about Fair Trade networks as an ‘alternative’ system with an oppositional stance, Fridell (2010; 2007; 2006; 2004) emphasizes that we must not lose sight of how the growth of these private networks have developed after more comprehensive and state-centered efforts to establish greater equity in the system of world trade – centered on state-level negotiations and multilateral agreements – have been dismantled under neoliberalism.

It is also important to recognize that while Fair Trade networks have grown in scale, this growth has been accompanied with some problems and criticisms. Because

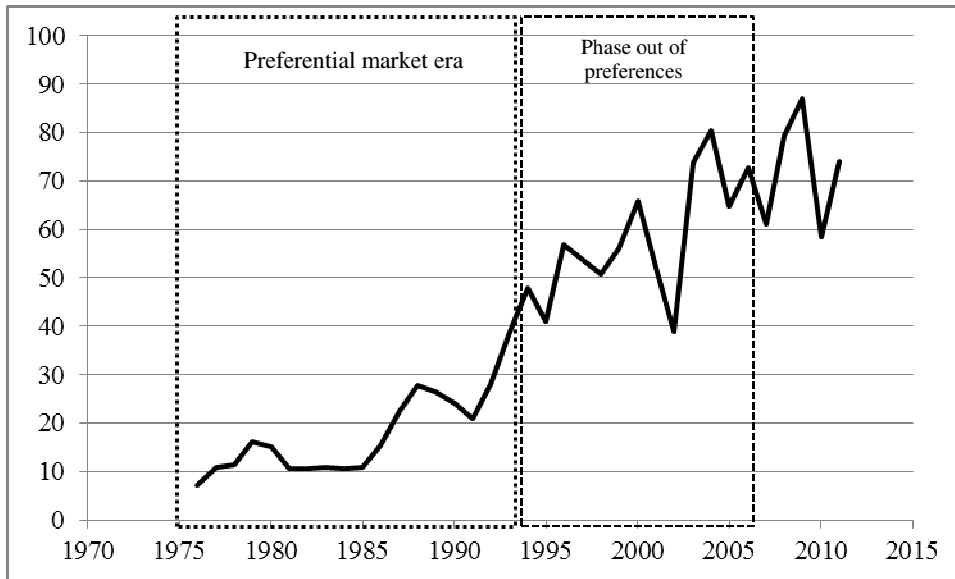
Fair Trade as a brand is based upon certain conceptions of ethical conduct (e.g. fair compensation for producers, democratic processes, and environmental practices), its growth relies upon increasing the capacity for certification, monitoring, and regulation in order to give consumers confidence that standards are met (Jaffee 2007; Moberg and Lyon 2010). This process of increasing scale and institutional capacity has also enabled Fair Trade certified products to move beyond small niche organizations and stores and into supermarkets and restaurant chains. However, critics have argued that the centralizing pressures associated with “mainstreaming” Fair Trade are straining (if not breaking) some of the core objectives on which it was premised (Jaffee 2007; Fridell 2007). That is, as Fair Trade networks move beyond a small number of producer associations which directly negotiate prices and standards with consumers, and involve increasingly large bureaucracies and distribution channels, there is a risk that the benefits reaching farmers and the potential for real participation in governance are bound to decline.

2.3 The case of Caribbean bananas

This paper uses a comparative case study of banana production in the small Caribbean countries of Belize and Dominica as a window to examine the uneven impacts of trade liberalization and how it is intensifying the enduring problems of agro-export dependence. Though bananas are grown on plantations in Belize and on small farms in Dominica, both have faced a shared macro-economic context of having lost access to preferential markets they had relied upon for decades, and both have sought to respond by establishing a new higher value niche in world trade. Belizean plantations have expanded production through compliance with high quality control standards in a new

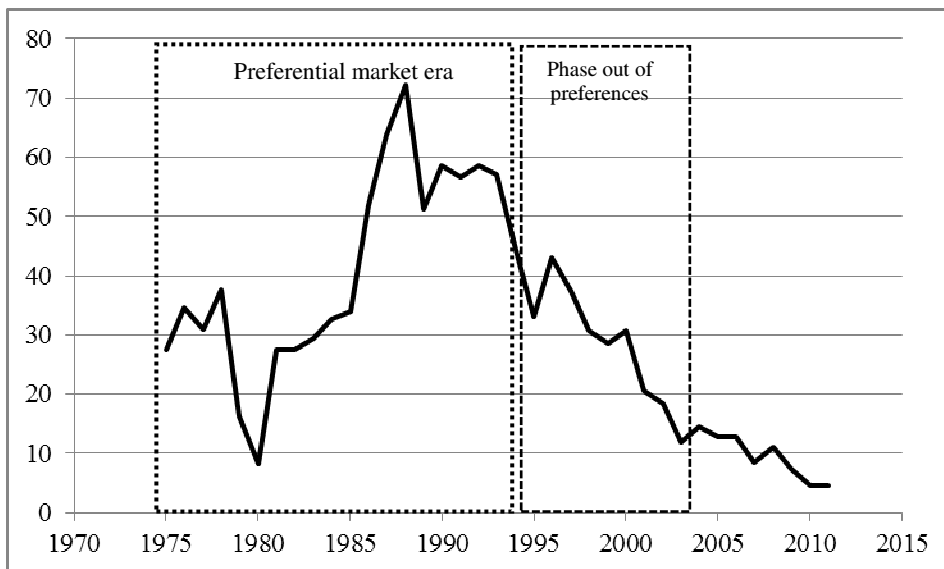
contract relationship with a large TNC, while Dominican small farmers have increasingly turned to Fairtrade certification, though many have abandoned bananas (and agriculture altogether). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the dramatically different trajectories of banana export volumes between these two countries.

Figure 1: Belizean banana exports from 1975-2012, by volume (thousand MT)



Source for data: FAOSTATS (2014)

Figure 2: Dominican banana exports from 1975-2012, by volume (thousand MT)



Source for data: FAOSTATS (2014)

The basic premise of this research is that it is important to understand the processes of contemporary agrarian change “on the ground”, learning about the perceptions and experiences of producers themselves as they encounter the increasing competitive pressures of global market integration. This draws from over eight months of immersed fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2012, focussing on in-depth interviews with plantation workers, managers, and owners in Belize (n=117), small farmers in Dominica (n= 77), and corporate representatives and relevant government officials (n=8) in each case, which was enhanced by extensive participant observation on small farms and plantations and in rural communities.

2.4 Belizean export ‘success’: growth without development

At a quick glance of export volumes, the Belizean banana industry appears to have been successful in restructuring beyond preferential trade, in contrast to Dominica and indeed most other ACP countries where banana export volumes have collapsed (FAOSTAT 2014; Anania 2008).⁴ Both export volumes and earnings have increased since the phase out of preferential markets. The key to this growth has been a new contract relationship with a large TNC, Fyffes, which hinges on rigorous quality control standards. The quality-based branding is encapsulated in the marketing slogan: *‘Fyffe times better than your average banana’*.

For the Belizean banana industry, this has brought higher prices than world market averages, though these prices are still tied to broader trends and per unit earnings

⁴ Although most of the ACP countries which exported bananas to Europe under preferential trade have had export volume collapse, in aggregate terms the volume of banana exports from ACP countries has increased, primarily as a result of marked increases Cameroon, Cote D’Ivoire, and Dominican Republic, and to a lesser extent Belize and Suriname (FAOSTAT 2014).

have declined considerably since 2009. In return for slightly higher prices, Belizean plantations must comply with additional controls over agronomic processes on fields and they are responsible for a much greater variation of specialized packaging, with over 20 different sorts of bagged and boxed containers (such packaging processes took place in Europe under preferential trade). While Belizean plantations are very large in comparison to Windward Island farms, enabling certain economies of scale, they are much smaller than typical plantations in Latin America, which has enabled them to be more responsive to the specific export standards that Fyffes sets.

One Belizean plantation manager explains how they must comply with “a lot of specifications” in order to meet these standards, including intensive farm audits that are made up of over 500 compliance measures as well as recommendations. In order to export bananas, a plantation needs to score 100 percent on “major” compliance measures, and 95 percent on “minor” ones, and the terms are such that failure on an audit can threaten exports from other Belizean plantations. A major aspect of these intensified standards is increased wastage. As one plantation owner explains, many “bananas we used to send can’t go anymore,” left to waste on farms before they are even sent to port, and while he expressed frustration he also recognized that meeting these standards is key to the industry’s survival.

Most plantation owners and managers expressed similar sentiments, conceding that the contract relationship was necessary yet despising the sense of domination. One manager described the extent of waste as “damning,” and some expressed a belief that monitoring goes up when production levels are higher than Fyffes is prepared to receive – allowing them to discard it (and project the wastes onto the producer) rather than

purchase it. In the words of one manager, “they wouldn’t say this, but it seems when the market is flooded, they f*#k you up.” Many compared Fyffes standards and monitoring procedures to bullying. The rage is palpable in the words of one manager: “the people from Fyffes are some mother f*#kers. They want you to work as slaves [and] send guys from quality control and just throw away any pallet for any reason. They feel they are owners of your farm.” Another manager laments how “they are very demanding,” and how “it is easy for them to tell us [that the fruit can’t sell], but they don’t know all the sh*t that we go through to meet what they are asking,” yet in the end noted that “if we want to produce and sell, we must abide as much as we can to it.”

A large part of these frustrations stems from the fact that the rigorous quality control standards, which demand greater inputs and labour, generate only modest price premiums while increasing wastage. In the most recent contract arrangement, meeting these standards increased the price of a box of Belizean bananas by US\$0.34-0.50, for US\$9 per 40 lb box for the first half of the year and US\$7.50 per box for the second half of the year.⁵ One manager described how the increased prices are barely enough relative to “the amount we have to put in to make the packs work,” noting that “it’s hard to make sense of why we do it really.” These low margins were often described in relation to the fact that Fyffes had transferred the processes of specialized packaging from higher-waged European workers to Belize with unfairly low compensation. In short, plantation owners

⁵ There is a different price for the first half and second half of the year based on the variable supply in the international market. Although bananas are grown all year round in the tropics, the greatest export volume arrives in the second half of the year, which reduces global box prices. The range in the price premiums for meeting standards depends on how the bananas were packed according to differentiated quality standards and specialty packaging within the 40 lb box.

and managers were acutely aware of the fact that the vast majority of the profits in bananas are extracted at the later stages of the commodity chain (Green 2006).

This sense of frustration was compounded by the fact that the financial risks are largely confined to producers, who must incur all of the on-farm investments to maintain yields and sufficient quality while facing losses from unmet quality standards as well as the vulnerability to damage from hurricanes, severe wind, cold spells, flooding, and drought. One owner explained how “every week you’re losing in that wasted fruit that doesn’t hit standards, even though it took up those inputs and labour on the farm already and that costs money for nothing,” as well as noting how at least one big weather event happens almost every year. As an example, he described how the previous year “we had two winds that came down that blew us...and this farm lost 63 acres, totally needed to replant,” as well as losing “40 percent of the plants that didn’t fall because the fruits on the trees were battered and damaged.”

While this context might inhibit future investments, owners and managers were clear that failing to invest promises a negative spiral of declining yields, quality, and lower sales. However, some plantation owners did indicate how they were starting to diversify their investments into neighbouring citrus and shrimp farm industries, as well as into foreign financial markets. Workers are very conscious of reduced on-farm investment, since most are paid by piecework and thus earn less when production declines. As one worker put it, “without investment, the production and quality go down, so we get less boxes and then we all get less pay. The whole team loses. In the end, it hurts him [the owner] too. If production gets too low, he can’t get money either... [but] we’re the ones who hurt first and most from the lack of investment.” Other workers

described similar frustrations about insufficient investments being made in production, reducing their prospects for piecework earnings, which was part of why many were feeling discouraged to continue.

The low and variable rates of pay for piecework (as losses to wastage can't be anticipated) and the lack of stability reflect how workers are “flexibilized”, as is increasingly characteristic of neoliberal work environments (Kay 2007). Most workers described how their pay from the plantation could barely sustain their households, and even some field supervisors noted how they were barely scraping by. While low piecework rates offer certain obvious advantages to owners, who are able to transfer some of their risks onto workers, it also serves to undermine commitment and discipline among workers. Many workers move between plantations in response to differential production levels, with one owner acknowledging how “low pay creates pressure on the workers so they are not compelled to stay.”

The instability of labour on Belizean plantations also relates to the heavy, long-term dependence on migrants from neighbouring Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. Since the 1980s, mestizos have made up the vast majority of the workforce in the Belizean banana industry, with indigenous Mayan Belizeans a small minority, a pattern that evolved as many desperate people fled the violence of civil war and counter-insurgencies and plantation owners found workers willing to take lower wages than Belizean nationals (Moberg 1997). Today, though the wars and counter-insurgencies have ended, Central America continues to experience high levels of violence (now much of it related to drug transshipment and gangs), as well as high levels of unemployment, and this fuels continuing migration into Belize. Even though migrants typically have

deficient access to basic social services, and many fail to pursue citizenship even after a considerable period in the country⁶, Belize is generally seen as being safer, having better wages and working conditions, and enhancing prospects of another migration to the United States.⁷ The way that Belizean banana plantations are viewed by many migrant workers was encapsulated well in the remark that “it’s not good, but it’s better.”

A recent government report on the banana industry highlighted the need to maintain the flow of migrant workers onto plantations in order “to keep costs down and be more competitive in the global market” (MED and MAF 2011:12). However, while migrant workers might work for less money than non-indigenous Belizeans, it is important to recognize that most view their jobs as temporary and transitional, sometimes with very short-term exit plans. Many would say things like, as one worker put it, “I’m here today, but I don’t even know if I’ll come again tomorrow,” while another joked that his return the next day might depend on the weather in the morning.

The net result is that there is a treadmill of poorly paid workers routinely cycling through plantations. This workforce instability not only adds to the time and cost of training but ultimately threatens the ability of plantations to consistently meet the quality control standards that have been set by Fyffes, both in the tangible sense of many workers lacking knowledge of technical procedures and in the intangible sense of lacking commitment to the long-term success of the operation. For instance, one manager noted how “today I only have 17 workers and I need 23,” and went onto explain that “it’s such

⁶ Part of this relates to the fact that some see Belize as a means to another migration northwards to the US, but it also relates to the fact that some migrants feel like the path to citizenship is intentionally made confusing and difficult for them.

⁷ For example, one female migrant worker described how she felt compelled to leave Guatemala to start over after her parents were murdered, while another noted that Belize “is safer for sure. You can go out, you can sleep well. It’s much more sane and healthy here.”

a problem because...everything needs to be done on time,” but “it can’t all get done” as a result of absenteeism. Another manager, noting how “timing is everything,” explained how quality is only possible “if we have conscientious workers,” and that problems tend to arise “when we have new workers and sometimes they just don’t get it right for a while. There’s lots to remember to get the best quality.”

In sum, the restructuring of Belizean banana plantations is filled with deep contradictions. The end of market quotas has enabled increasing export volumes and a monopoly contract with Fyffes has guaranteed unit prices above world-market averages, though this has also created greater risks, as challenging quality control standards have increased both planned and unplanned costs (i.e. from greater wastage). Plantations faced with the prospect of higher volume but lower margin exports and heightened risks generate only low and mostly piecework pay, which assures continuing workforce instability. High worker turnover leads to greater training costs and exacerbates wastage from failing standards, which adds to risks of weather-related disasters. This threatens a negative spiral of declining investments by owners and declining earnings for workers, which could ultimately undermine the very basis of the contract relationship: the ability to meet quality control standards.

The restructuring of the Belizean banana industry shows how agro-export growth not only does not necessarily translate to improved rural living conditions but that, on the contrary, the pursuit of competitiveness can be implicated in worsening prospects for long-term development. The districts of Belize where the banana industry is concentrated have the lowest socioeconomic indicators in the country, including high levels of poverty and unemployment and increasing evidence of rural squatting (MED and MAF 2011,

UNDP 2013), which provides a searing indictment of the inequality of plantation production and how it is being accentuated by trade liberalization and increased corporate control over commodity chains.

2.5 Fair Trade as a shadow of what used to exist: Perspectives of Dominican small farmers

At the peak of the preferential trade era, over 70 percent of Dominica's population was involved in banana production and over 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings came from banana exports (Trouillot 1988). As noted, bananas were widely seen to represent 'Green Gold', as preferential markets insulated exports from the low and volatile prices of the international market, and this was coupled with European development assistance, together producing widespread improvements from public infrastructure and social services to the housing stock.

Less tangible, but certainly very notable was how my interview participants consistently described bananas in this historic era with a sense of pride and as a positive force in community development, to an extent that it seemed clear that rural culture was strong and small farming was seen as a dignified livelihood. Further, banana cultivation on small farms in Dominica (and the Windward Islands more generally) was not only far more equitable than on plantations but it was also more sustainable, due to the ecological benefits of intercropping (i.e. planting other crops between rows of bananas, for both food and sale) and because production required much less chemicals. Indeed, some participants noted how they sought to limit chemical usage in these integrated fields because they recognized that chemical pesticides were bad for their own health *and* for the health of the far away consumers who would be eating their bananas.

But small farm-based banana production in Dominica and the Windward Islands lacked many competitive advantages of large plantations, such as cableways, irrigation systems, aerial spraying, and large packing sheds, which enable them to reduce labour costs relative to output. For instance, whereas Dominican farmers and family members occasionally spray pesticides individually using small-scale devices, plantations regularly spray huge areas with low-flying planes; and whereas Dominicans carry banana bunches individually over their heads to small packing shelters, plantations have extensive cableway systems for moving bunches to be packed. Clearly, Dominican small farmers did not seem fit to compete beyond the end of preferential trade, as there was little hope of investing in new labour-saving technologies, cutting costs, and competing in terms of price, nor were there any clear alternatives that seemed capable of absorbing the lost earnings for small farmers. In short, it seemed clear that the demise of the preferential market would provide a shock to the Dominican countryside (Myers 2004).

Within this context of acute dependence on bananas and an inability to cope with the low prices of a liberalized trade environment there arose the idea to position Windward Island banana exports within a Fair Trade network as a means of generating higher prices for farmers than could be attained through open markets. The first Fair Trade export from Dominica occurred in 2001, and this subsequently rose quickly, with 30 percent of the country's banana exports Fair Trade certified by 2004, 90 percent Fair Trade certified by 2009 (WINFA 2011), and virtually all Fair Trade certified today.

In many respects, Dominica seemed to be an ideal candidate for achieving Fair Trade certification. In particular, the relatively equitable, small farmer-dominated landscape seemingly meshes well with the aim of valorizing small farmer earnings and

good environmental stewardship, and the strong rural culture that surrounded banana production seemingly aligns with the aim of rooting trading relationships in democratic forms of decision-making. Further, while Fair Trade had initially grown through more durable commodities like coffee (especially), cocoa, tea, and sugar, bananas are one of the hardiest tropical fruits capable of moving through smaller trading networks than those organized by TNCs. This potential is reflected in the fact that Fair Trade bananas have grown dramatically from the early 2000s to today (FairTrade 2014). Yet as illustrated in Figure 2, the establishment of a Fair Trade network for bananas has not stopped the dramatic decline in banana exports from Dominica since preferential markets were challenged at the WTO, and at the heart of this research was an attempt to understand why Fair Trade has not provided a more significant alternative to trade liberalization for small farmers.

While Fair Trade has enabled some small farmers in Dominica to cope with the end of preferential markets, many have exited banana production and farming, and of those who continue to produce bananas few perceive Fair Trade as something capable of sustaining long-term rural development. The vast majority of participants spoke of their experiences and perspectives in very different ways than Fair Trade is commonly viewed in rich countries. One of the most consistent themes expressed was a sense of diminished agency, a key value that is supposed to underpin the idea of Fair Trade. In this respect, it was especially jarring (given the mostly positive connotations about Fair Trade I went into this research with) to hear some participants describe Fair Trade as a colonial enterprise, as something “implemented by the white man” as one farmer put it. This was echoed by another, who noted that: “Fair Trade felt like our only option because if we

didn't do it, our bananas couldn't be sold anywhere... or at least that's what the white man came and told us. But he didn't tell us how much we'd have to change in order to produce bananas for Fair Trade, and how much those regulations would continue to change and change without a warning."

Though not everyone described Fair Trade in such negative terms, there was a very pervasive sense of frustration and demoralization expressed by participants over how decisions about production and pricing are made. Most saw the network as something that operated at a great distance from them, and in a hierarchical way, which was reflected in how they consistently talked about it as something that was controlling them rather than something they had an active role in shaping. One farmer noted that "we show up at our community meetings, which I go to only because I have to, not because I feel like what I say will make any kind of difference." Another described this in despairing terms: "it leaves me hopeless. Farming used to be fun but now it's just someone else, far away, telling me what to do and not even paying me to do it."

This sense of hierarchy, distance, and lack of participation also relates to the fact that farmers did not perceive a more direct relationship to consumers, as Fair Trade promises. On the contrary, many described their position within the network in terms of exploitation. Part of this stemmed from a belief that many new tasks were being imposed upon them without any democratic process. The sense of imposed, top-down decisions is reflected in a comment by one farmer that "it's just last week—again—that our WIFT [Windward Island Fair Trade] extension officer gave word that the boxes and bags we put our bananas in for TESCO are changing next week. You think they asked us? Man, no, they just tell us. We all have piles of the old boxes in our sheds already." Others

described how the process of certification was very opaque to them, and how community meetings felt like one-way dialogues in which they were told what to do. Some described their sense that directives were not only coming from WIFT representatives but also from TESCO, the large British-based supermarket TNC.

Farmer's sense of exploitation also stemmed from a belief that their labour was being undervalued by the prices generated through Fair Trade. While Fair Trade promises premium prices to producers in principle, those premiums are not immune from broader price trends in world markets. Whereas Dominican farmers could expect stable prices for their bananas under preferential trade, the turn to a Fair Trade network following the WTO ruling subjected them to the volatility and general downward price trends in world markets, cushioned modestly by the premiums added in the Fair Trade network. Fair Trade therefore represents a weaker and more fluctuating price premium than what existed in the past, and this is made worse by the fact that the Fair Trade prices in bananas specifically have been found to languish relative to the costs of production in the vast majority of certified producing countries (Fair Trade 2014).

Complaints over prices echoed again and again. One farmer lamented how “more and more, they tell us our quality isn't what they want it. But how do they expect us to improve, if the labour to control these things is too expensive for us to afford?” He noted how inputs keep “going up in price, but our bananas, people don't pay for them...I know you guys up there love your bananas. But why don't you pay us, the people who produce them, sunup to sundown, working hard in the fields?” Another farmer noted how she struggles to afford to pay additional labourers with the prices she earns: “no one wants to

work for you in the fields anymore, ‘cuz it’s too low pay” than what she can afford to pay.

In general, while farmers consistently expressed a strong sense of pride about the nature of their production, many described their involvement in Fair Trade with a sense of resignation. One farmer said that he wished he “had just left bananas years ago and maybe then, I know how to do something else by now. Trust me, now there’s nothing “fair” about Fair Trade in my opinion...maybe the only reason to stay is that they keep me in shape.” These conceptions of farming are also contributing to profound demographic and cultural changes, as idle fields are becoming more common and few young people see any future in banana production. One farmer said “there’s not a chance” she would want her son to join her on her farm, saying that “I wouldn’t even be doing this anymore, but it’s all I know. I just don’t have the courage to plant something else, but you see, slowly I’m starting to move into vegetables. I keep telling myself, the next hurricane that passes through and wipes out all these bananas again, that’s when I’ll move on. My friends tell me the same thing.” These comments also reflect how most farmers perceive their agency mainly in terms of withdrawing from the Fair Trade network, bananas, or even farming.

In sum, there was a remarkable degree of consensus among participants that Fair Trade pales in comparison to the system of preferential markets that preceded it. Participants described a heightened sense of dependence in a variety of ways, the essence of which is feeling trapped in a new commodity chain that hinges on the meaning it holds for privileged and ‘enlightened’ consumers in the North yet means little to them beyond a modest price premium.

2.6 Conclusions

Dependence on a small range of commodity exports poses an enduring problem for rural development in the Global South. Bananas are an archetypal tropical commodity, marked by low and volatile prices on world markets, a high degree of control by a small number of TNCs, and the predominance of plantation production. The banana industry in the Caribbean has a more differentiated legacy, having grown in the context of a broader fair trade movement which understood that the problems of tropical commodity dependence and declining terms of trade require the intervention of states to stabilize export prices and volumes, including North-South trade agreements that were negotiated by groups of states. The EU-ACP system of preferential trade was notable in this regard, as it brought considerable social and economic gains for many producers, perhaps nowhere more dramatically than in small Windward Island countries like Dominica.

However, the broader movement for fair trade was challenged in the neoliberal era, and the WTO's 'banana wars' ruling against the EU-ACP system of preferential trade was an important event in this. One of the central tenets of neoliberal policy restructuring is that producers and whole countries must compete according to their comparative advantage under the discipline of trade liberalization, which will enable competitive producers to expand and force uncompetitive ones out of production. In this context, cost-efficiency is the primary means of competition, but some higher value market niches are possible based on certain product differentiation, like quality standards, as in the Belizean case, and Fair Trade certification, as in Dominica.

This research reveals how these partial responses to the problem of tropical commodity dependence are leading to uneven social outcomes and costs, both in the Belizean context where production is expanding in response to the opportunity for low-margin growth, and in the Dominican context where production is collapsing amidst the expanding capacity of a Fair Trade network. In both cases, the trading relationships that have arisen are much less stable than the long-term, state-managed purchase commitments which were dismantled by the WTO (Fridell 2010)

While fair trade networks seek to highlight the imbalances in power and value within commodity chains, they should not be reified as an alternative to neoliberalism. Fair Trade networks are but partial remnants of a broader movement, and can be sanctioned under neoliberalism due to their private and market-driven nature and the fact that they reflect a diminished conception of how social justice concerns can and should be addressed, one that is centered upon benevolent consumer behaviour as opposed to long-term state-to-state commitments (Fridell 2010; 2007; Jaffee 2007).

As can be seen in the struggles to compete in bananas, from tenuous plantation growth in Belize to diminished small farm livelihoods in Dominica, there is an urgent need to renew of the broader fair trade movement pushing for more equitable, democratic, and transparent trading relationships.

3. A precarious dependence: liberalization and agrarian change in the Belizean banana belt

Abstract

The liberalization of trade is one of the core tenets of neoliberalism, with a basic assumption that production will be disciplined by comparative advantage and that individual producers will be forced to become more competitive. By some measures, the banana industry in Belize can be seen to have succeeded along this path over the past decade, as it has managed to grow following the phase-out of protected markets in Europe. This paper explores some of the key ways that production in the Belizean 'banana belt' has been restructured in order to compete, and how this has affected the conditions of agrarian labour. The research is based upon fieldwork conducted in Belize over 5 months in 2012, including 121 qualitative interviews with plantation workers, managers, and owners, as well as government officials. The analysis focuses on how Belizean plantations have cultivated a high value export niche based on rigorous quality standards, the tactics that owners and management teams are using to contain workers in the face of these new imperatives, and the responses of workers to these new strategies, who are conforming in some ways and resisting in others. This evolving labour regime, and in particular the transient nature of many workers, threatens to undermine a key facet of this new export niche: the adherence to quality standards. The precariousness of these dynamics raises challenging questions for commodity dependent countries that continue to devote large areas of their best arable land to agro-exports.

3.1 Introduction

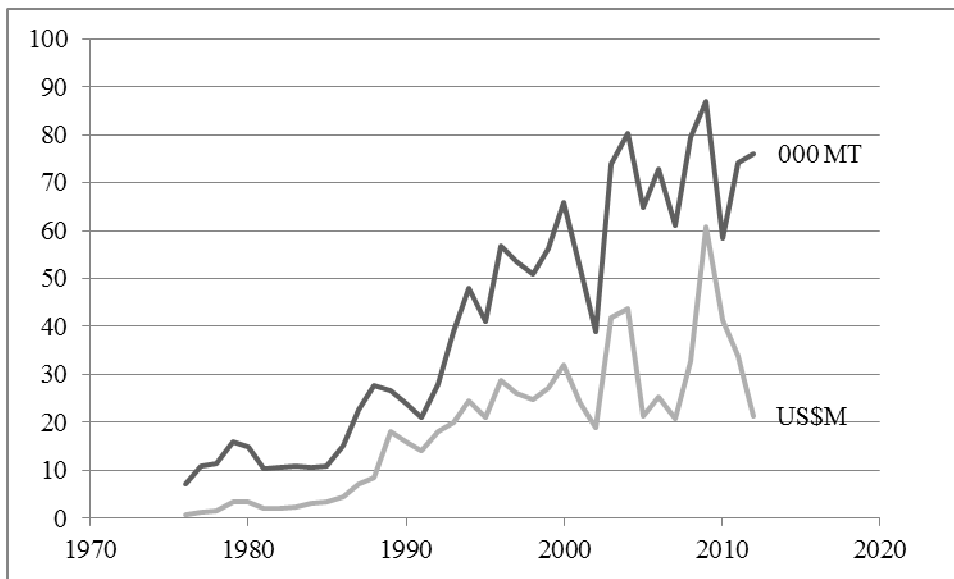
For over two decades, beginning in the mid-1970s, banana exports from the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group of nations had preferential access to European Commission (later European Union) markets (Fridell 2011; Moberg 2010). The quotas and stable prices this system provided helped to establish a considerable dependence upon banana exporting in Belize, as it did in a number of other small countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (Murray and Raynolds 2000).⁸ However, in the mid-1990s the EU-ACP system of preferential trade was determined to be ‘unfair’ by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which ruled that it had to be phased out (Myers, 2004). As this occurred, banana production and exports quickly collapsed in many ACP nations, most notably in the small Windward Island nations of the eastern Caribbean where bananas had come to wholly dominate the export base (Anania 2008; Moberg and Striffler 2003).

But in a few ACP nations, such as Cameroon, Cote D’Ivoire, the Dominican Republic, and Belize, banana exports increased as preferences and quotas were phased out (Anania 2008). With a population of just 320,000 people, Belize is the smallest state where banana exporting has expanded in the wake of liberalization, with an industry that covers around 2400 ha (6000 acres) and employs roughly 3000 people directly and 10,000 indirectly (Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Agriculture

⁸ Belize only achieved its independence from Britain in 1981, and though it is physically part of Central America, it has long had much more in common with the British Caribbean socially, culturally, politically, and economically, as part of both the ACP and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Some interactions with neighbouring Central American countries are intensifying, as discussed in this paper.

and Fisheries, 2011).⁹ Though this is tiny by global standards, in relative terms the industry is extremely significant to Belize, as a sizable share of the national workforce and as the third largest export by value, representing about 15 percent of the country's total export earnings in 2012 (FAOSAT, 2014). Figure 1 indicates how Belizean banana exports grew steadily in terms of volume and value following the onset of preferential trade in the 1970s, and continued rising in the late 1990s even as these preferences were phased out (it also reflects the inherent vulnerability of the industry to severe weather events like hurricanes, which have been responsible for some major sudden dips in production, and the volatile relationship between volume and earnings discussed later).

Figure 3: Belizean banana exports from 1975-2012, by volume (thousand MT) and value (million USD)



source for data: FAOSTAT (2014)

⁹ Indirect employment is broadly defined as the auxiliary work beyond the plantations themselves; that is, work that is related to the banana industry but does not occur in the fields or the packing sheds. Some examples include: the truck drivers who drive the bananas from plantations to port, the staff at the port, and the market vendors who sell the lower class bananas in the local market.

According to neoliberal economic discipline, agricultural growth is expected to be export-led, with land and labour focused on commodities that have a comparative advantage while markets are opened to everything else (Weis 2007a). In Belize, this has meant continuing to struggle to compete in bananas following the loss of preferential trade, though the industry lacks the economies of scale and other cost ‘efficiencies’ of its competitors. The key to its survival in this changing context has been the establishment of a niche export market that is contingent on new quality standards, and that generates higher prices than could otherwise be earned in world markets. A central objective of this research was to understand what these competitive pressures entail on the ground, and in particular the implications of this restructuring on the conditions of agrarian labour. Through this, it seeks to problematize the nature of comparative advantage in the global marketplace, and show how it ultimately rests on precarious social relations, which in turn sheds light on some of the tensions associated with continuing dependence on the export of tropical agricultural commodities.

3.2 Preferential markets and the making of the modern banana industry in Belize

Bananas are the most traded fruit in the world, with over 17 million tonnes in 2011 (FAOSTAT 2014). As with most tropical commodities, banana exports have earned low prices that have steadily declined in real terms for decades, owing to a range of factors such as the intense competition in world markets from many producers. They are, in short, a prime example of the interrelated problems of being dependent upon a narrow range of commodities which experience falling terms of trade over the long-term (Robbins 2003).

The world market in bananas has long been dominated by a small number of US-based transnational corporations (TNCs), principally Dole, Del Monte, and Chiquita, who have controlled much of the trade derived from production on large plantations in Latin America. The well-known phrase ‘Banana Republics’ has marked the ugly nature of this industry throughout the region, in particular the powerful alliances between US-based corporate interests, landed elites, and national political and military leaders, and the ruthless exploitation of plantation labour (Chapman 2009). Although the United Fruit Company (UFC) cleared 2500 acres of land for banana production in the Stann Creek district of Belize in the early 20th century¹⁰, this production was relatively unsuccessful and quickly abandoned – sparing Belize from the fate of becoming a ‘Banana Republic’ like its neighbours (Moberg 1997).

After the demise of this attempt by the UFC, banana production in Belize (then British Honduras) did not expand again until after the Lomé Convention in 1976, which established preferential access for bananas and other commodities from ACP countries into Europe (Myers 2004; Josling and Taylor 2003).¹¹ As noted earlier, the advent of this preferential market was crucial to the establishment of the modern banana industry in Belize, as the assurance of stable prices and volumes made exporting seem viable even with unit production costs that were considerably higher than on other Central American plantations. Banana plantations were targeted for the same general region the UFC had abandoned earlier in the century, the southern part of Stann Creek, along with the northern part of the adjoining Toledo district (see Figure 2). The re-birth of the ‘banana

¹⁰ The first banana exports from the colony actually date to the early 1800s, though production never took off.

¹¹ Along with non-reciprocal trade preferences, Lomé also locked in a European commitment to development assistance.

belt' under the leadership of the Banana Control Board was intended to stimulate development in a region that suffered from the highest levels of poverty in the new country (Moberg 1997).

Figure 4: The location of the 'Banana Belt' in Belize



Map modified from <http://belizegateway.com/>

The Banana Control Board was initially composed of roughly 20 growers who either represented their own large-scale production or smaller cooperative units, but this system was quickly replaced with the Banana Growers Association, composed of 9 large-scale growers. This consolidation of power reflected some of the challenges in building this industry from scratch. First, significant capital investment was needed for things like cable ways, irrigation systems, packing sheds and equipment, and large volumes of agro-

chemicals, as plantation owners pursued economies of scale (though Belizean plantations remained relatively small in comparison to those in other parts of Central America). Second, the risks of this capital investment were compounded by the fact that the cost of plantation labour was relatively high in Belize,¹² and while the volume of exports took off quickly in the late 1970s, exports quickly plateaued in the early 1980s. To improve their margins, Belizean plantation owners sought to reduce their labour costs, and in this benefitted from the immense political upheaval in Central America at the time (Moberg 1997).

As revolutionary forces in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador fought against US-backed dictatorships and counter-insurgencies in the proverbial ‘bloody 1980s’, hundreds of thousands of people were killed or displaced in the region. The waves of desperate migration flowed in different directions out of these countries, including spilling over into Belize. For some migrants, Belize was not only viewed as a safe haven in itself but was also perceived as a potential stepping stone as an English speaking country with a relatively stronger currency compared to those of the region, to a bigger and brighter destination with greater opportunities: the United States. The coupling of these migratory pressures with the desire of Belizean plantation owners to cut labour costs meant that Central American migrants quickly came to constitute the large majority of banana plantation workers in Belize – a shift that coincided with the dramatic surge in banana exports after 1985 evident in Figure 1. Given how the roots of this violence, insecurity, and displacement lay in the enduring legacies of the ‘Banana Republic’ era, it

¹² Belize is classed as an ‘upper middle income’ country by the World Bank and has a ‘medium’ Human Development Index ranking according to the UNDP. Given that Belize’s per capita GNI (around \$7600 in 2012) is considerably higher than many other banana producing countries, this translates into higher wage levels on a global scale – even if plantation wages are among the lowest in the country.

is a bitter irony that the Belizean banana industry grew up in this way (Koeppel 2009; Chapman 2009; Bucheli and Read 2006).

Ultimately, the desperation driving migration served as a powerful discipline on plantation labour, magnified by migrants' knowledge that many others were seeking work beyond the border. But it was not only desperation or hopes for a path to the US that caused some of the migrants to set down new roots in Belize, as the expansion of bananas in the 1980s and into the 1990s was accompanied by various European development commitments associated with the Lomé Convention, including support for rural electrification and sanitation, housing, roads, schools, and medical facilities. So while migrant workers initially moved into generally awful living and working conditions (Moberg 1997), there were measurable improvements in things such as the housing stock and basic health and education services over time.

3.3 The demise of preferential markets and competitive restructuring on the ground

Although the EU-ACP preferential trade regime represented a relatively small share of global trade in bananas, the US along with leading Latin American banana exporting countries (pressed by the US-based TNCs who dominated world trade) challenged its legitimacy through the WTO, shortly after it had come into effect in 1995. The ensuing legal battle – famously dubbed the ‘banana wars’ – played out over the late 1990s as part of the deepening institutionalization of trade liberalization, and in the end the WTO forced the EU to phase out the preferential access afforded to ACP imports.¹³

¹³ The WTO essentially ruled that preferences based on negotiations between groups of states constituted an ‘unfair’ trade practice. The EU challenged this ruling, but it was upheld upon appeal. Under preferential trade, the EU maintained volume quotas for ACP bananas that had ensured each country a certain percentage of the negotiated total, while imposing tariffs on all non-ACP bananas to increase their price in EU markets. Liberalization meant both progressively reducing ACP quotas and progressively

As noted at the outset, while many banana exporters in ACP countries have proven unable to compete without their share of the guaranteed ACP market, the Belizean banana industry has managed to ramp up production and exports in the wake of liberalization and the elimination of quotas. This growth has hinged on the successful cultivation of a high quality brand reputation for premium freshness and packaging, which rests on contracts with a single TNC, Fyffes. According to some powerful metrics of development, like production and export earnings, this might be seen to be a great competitive success story, with liberalization having forced new efficiencies.

However, there is an underbelly to this restructuring, as the contract relationship with Fyffes entails intensifying corporate control over the production process, with rigorous quality standards leading to increased demands being placed on owners, management and plantation workers. In order to understand the changing conditions of plantation labour in this context, this research sought to explore whether farm owners and management teams were enforcing new disciplines or changing managerial tactics, and if so, how farm workers were responding to the range of managerial strategies being deployed. It is based upon 5 months of immersed fieldwork in 2012, and a two week scoping exercise in 2010, and included 121 qualitative interviews, countless informal conversations, and extensive participant observation with plantation workers, farm managers, landowners, and relevant government officials.¹⁴

eliminating non-ACP tariffs, with the result that ACP bananas were put into direct competition with one another and with more cost-efficient producers in non-ACP countries.

¹⁴ Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews with workers and managers were mostly conducted in Spanish and subsequently translated into English, while the majority of interviews with owners and government officials were conducted in English. Interview data was analyzed according to themes that were drawn from the literature and that emerged throughout the course of fieldwork. Participant observation was especially helpful in triangulating interview data on subjects where participants were less forthcoming.

The research approach took inspiration from Tsing's (2005) ethnography of the logging industry in Indonesia, which considered the 'friction' at the intersections of structural political economic forces, operating at multiple scales, and the responses of different actors. This research also followed Tsing (2005) in attempting to understand how the complex tensions associated with highly unequal social relations play out in the course of production, and how they can fester or get ameliorated in ways that are often not unified or coordinated, with a recognition that there are many blurry lines between things like legality and illegality, public and private, discipline and manipulative exploitation, and submission and resistance.

The complex picture that emerges from this analysis is one of difficult working conditions and mounting social tensions, which could threaten to undermine a key foundation of the Belizean export niche. That is, a key aspect of the contract relationship between Belizean plantations and Fyffes is adherence to quality standards, but this is reverberating in conditions that threaten the reproduction of the sort of stable labour force that is needed to meet these standards – contradictions which highlight the precariousness of this new 'comparative advantage'.

3.4 The restructuring imperative

Before approaching the question of how the Belizean industry has sought to compete in a liberalized trade environment, it is important to first recognize that the question of whether alternatives should have been considered as the preferential market collapsed barely registered among any research participants, from workers to managers, to plantation owners, to government officials. Responses to such counterfactual questions can shed important insights into the balance of social forces at work, including the sorts

of radical imaginations that could help to fire resistance or, as in this case, how their absence can perpetuate the status quo.

The vast majority of participants interviewed, from the highest to the lowest levels of the banana industry, framed the process of restructuring with a sense of inevitability. A rhetorical question that recurred again and again in interviews was simply: “if not bananas, then what?” Embedded in this is the assumption that Belize’s agricultural economy must be heavily export-oriented, that there is little room for manoeuvre, and that the unavoidable challenge is to find some way of competing in world markets. For plantation owners and managers, this general view was augmented by the capital expended on specifically banana-related infrastructure over the past 4 decades, and the forbidding costs of conversion (e.g. equipment, inputs, and expertise). Government officials also expressed concerns about squandering past private and state investments in bananas, while raising questions about labour absorption and fears of widespread unemployment in a part of the country already plagued by high levels of un- and under-employment¹⁵. These fears also echoed loudly in the responses of many plantation workers, who regularly acknowledged their nervousness about having low levels of education and few transferable skills, and had difficulty envisioning stable livelihoods in the absence of banana plantations.

In short, for varying reasons and from different class perspectives, participants expressed a powerful sense of inertia about the need to somehow make bananas work. In this light, it is hardly surprising that amidst the phase-out of preferential markets, the

¹⁵ According to a recent government report, in 2010 roughly 20 percent of the labour force in Stann Creek and the northern Toledo District was unemployed (Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries 2011).

leaders of Belizean banana industry were interested in an offer presented by Fyffes, an Irish-based TNC (long before it merged with US-based Chiquita Brands to form the biggest single player in the global trade in bananas), to supply carefully packaged bananas that are above world-market standards, in return for above world-market prices.

This contract relationship was presented as ‘win-win’ for both Fyffes and the banana industry in Belize, as Fyffes sought to respond to increasing quality demands in the European consumer market, while Belizean plantations needed an arrangement that would compensate for their higher costs of production. Here, the relatively small size of the Belizean banana industry was seen as an advantage for this higher-value niche market, as it was seen to be more capable of implementing and enforcing higher quality controls over growing and packaging than could occur in larger sectors, as in the leading Latin American exporters.¹⁶

The general manager of the Banana Growers Association of Belize summarizes the new reality, explaining that “Belize bananas are marketable because we have a consistent product that meets... standards,” which relates to both the fruit itself and its packaging. He also pointed out the importance of increasingly differentiated packaging in the definition of quality, explaining how there were only 2 basic packages 20 years ago, “small (from 6-8 inches) and large (8 inches up),” whereas size differentiation alone involves many more categories, with the industry now capable of managing “22 packs every week and those change in numbers all the time.” One farm manager notes how “just today we’re packing single fingers, [and] bagged snack bananas...It never used to be like that.”

¹⁶ For a sense of scale, the world’s leading banana exporter, Ecuador, exports on average more bananas in a week than Belize does all year (FAOSTAT 2014)

Heightened product and packaging standards have significantly increased risks of wasted fruit. One manager contrasted how payment incentives for meeting quality standards under the preferential trade regime have been replaced with penalties for not meeting them, at the same time as new quality standards “have gone way high” – to an extent that one year “we had more [bananas in] waste than we were boxing.” The determination of sub-standard quality occurs for an array of reasons. For instance, if a sticker is placed on the bottom of the banana instead of on the top, if a banana has a brown damage spot on the peel, or if a 40 lb box reaches the export port more than 0.1 lb underweight, the whole box gets deemed un-exportable. The risk to the growers is magnified further still by the fact that an individual box found to be underweight at either the export or import port can lead to the rejection of the whole pallet of 60 boxes that it is part of.¹⁷

Another example of how heightened quality control standards serve to augment risks and costs for growers can be seen in the increased attention and management given to various agronomic processes, including sucker deviation, bunch bagging, deflowering, plant anchoring, spraying, cutting, and careful harvesting procedures. To illustrate this, many managers pointed to sucker deviation as an example,¹⁸ explaining how failure to cut and move suckers on time can damage the bunch that is growing so that it “won’t

¹⁷ Fyffes has also exerted pressure to supply boxes up to 1lb heavier than the listed weight in order to compensate for the weight that it claims is lost as fruit shrinks during travel. But for growers, this entails lost profit since the extra 1 lb of fruit is not accounted for in box prices, as well as increasing the risks of bruising, since the boxes are intended for 40lbs of fruit. Many growers believe that the risks of having boxes discarded for being underweight are less than the losses associated with essentially providing an additional pound for free coupled with the risks of damage from over-stuffing boxes.

¹⁸ This relates to the fact that multiple banana shoots (or suckers) grow out of the same root base, and only the one best positioned to thrive is left while a bunch is growing, with the others cut out. The process of sucker deviation concentrates the plant energy in order to encourage heavier bunch weights, but also to avoid damage on the bunch from the leaves of other suckers.

meet standards,” with the result that even “if you get a big bunch, all of the fruit that has been scarred by the sucker has to be thrown away. So it’s very important and it’s very challenging that you have everything done properly and on time by everyone.” Others pointed to the careful harvesting procedures, including new cut-to-carry techniques to avoid bruising, and foam inserts to protect the bananas from one another during carry.

Risks of wastage produce a range of pressures for owners. One basic response has been to try to increase output per acre. One owner described how his plantation had “been averaging 620 boxes per acre,” roughly in line with the rest of the industry, but that his goal was “to reach 1000 boxes per acre to be able to start to turn profit with this competitive market, with the disappearance of the preferential market.” For him, “the only way we can survive” is to expand production while also enhancing quality and packaging: “we need to increase our bunch size, we need to increase the bunch weight, we need to throw away less fruit in the packing shed, and we need to pack the fruit to the quality. More sigatoka [a widespread disease affecting bananas] control, more irrigation on time, more nematicide [a type of chemical pesticide] when needed, fertilizer on time and as necessary.” The owners made it clear that they perceived a trade-off between achieving higher yields of higher quality fruit versus incurring higher costs, especially because fertilizers and chemical inputs were becoming increasingly expensive.

One reason that inputs were seen to be rising is due to the pressure exerted by Fyffes to shift production schedules to better balance output over the year and to increase production in the low-season. In addition to using increased inputs to stimulate growth at different stages, balancing annual output also entails more careful management of replanting, growing, and harvesting cycles, which is obviously more labour intensive and

costly than having larger areas of land at the same growing stage. One owner complained about how the risks of rising input costs are entirely confined to producers, noting how “fertilizer was going up in price like crazy, we used to pay \$38 for fertilizer and now we’re paying something like \$80,” while Fyffes can hide behind a fixed purchasing contract. Another owner described his sense of what Fyffes would say to any request for higher prices: “‘that [is] the price and take it or leave it, we [can] just go to another country and we get our bananas’. That’s what they do.”. In short, growers perceived a serious power differential in the contract relationship. In stark contrast to the initial ‘win-win’ imagery for Fyffes (getting high quality bananas) and the banana industry in Belize (getting relatively higher prices), noted earlier, one owner insists that these quality standards are “never a win-win” situation for producers. One farm manager lamented how he wished he “could say take it or leave it” on one hand, referring to better terms of trade, while recognizing that Belize had almost no leverage: “You could cry blood, but they don’t care...When they [Fyffes representatives] come, they look for ways to bend you into submission.”

While some plantation owners and managers described cutting their use of fertilizers and chemicals when rising input costs were making their margins untenable with fixed prices for banana boxes, some workers reported having their pay entirely withheld on occasion in order for the plantation to afford financing for fertilizers or chemicals that were needed at key junctures when the plantation was not solvent to cover both input and wage costs at that time. In such cases, plantations were essentially projecting the burden of protecting their investments in the banana crop onto workers, and although this only happened on rare occasions, it forced them to go into their savings

to feed their families. Yet workers were also concerned even when paying wages was prioritized over input usage during solvency crises, as they recognized how production levels were bound to decline and in turn drive down piecework wages at a later point. Because of this, one worker insisted that “we’re the ones who hurt first and most from the lack of investment.” This view was strongly affirmed by one plantation owner, who described how declining margins had forced his farm manager to “cut our fertilizer program by 25 percent and cut irrigation by 25 percent and we’ve decreased pest control – no more nematicide – which of course means our production decreases,” while explicitly noting how it is the workers who are “the ones who suffer the most” from this in the end.

The difficult calculations and trade-offs associated with this cost-price squeeze are made even more challenging by the sporadic damage inflicted by extreme climate events like hurricanes, and the fact that the nature of the contract relationship means that “all the risks are on the farm,” as one owner put it. While disaster-related losses affect owners, managers, and workers, this owner also emphasized how the temporary displacement of workers in the wake of disasters can also have a longer-term effect on production because plantations have “a hard time picking up again without a good steady labour.”

In short, it is clear that both plantation owners and workers feel strained by the pressures associated with the terms of this contract relationship. Most owners described how they either had to re-invest more of their savings than they felt comfortable doing, take out new loans, or decrease investments – recognizing that the latter route guaranteed a downward spiral of decreased production and quality and impoverished livelihoods for

workers. Most owners and managers are also well aware that the conditions facing workers are contributing to an unsustainable situation, in which they find it harder and harder to reproduce the sort of workforce they need, and it is here where attention now turns.

3.5 The challenge of reproducing a stable and disciplined workforce

The pressures on workers from things such as reduced piecework output from low production or produce that is discarded for failing to meet standards is contributing to highly transient conditions. One plantation owner, after noting how “in the past we had no problem with workers,” went so far as to insist that the challenge of maintaining the workers they need is now “the hardest” one he faces. This is a serious contradiction that threatens the industry’s survival, as it butts up directly against the demands associated with high quality control standards.

Plantation owners and managers were found to employ a range of tactics to try to stabilize the workforce. The most widespread approach has been to use bureaucratic disciplines for migrant workers from other countries in Central America, who make up the vast majority of the workforce. One manager explained how these workers are forced to leave their passports and three pictures with management, and they are then distributed “to the labour and immigration department to get a work permit for that person.” He elaborated that:

...before we send in the passport, we ask the person if they want to work for three months or six months or one year. This will say to work at Farm number whatever, but it’s valid at any other farm too. It’s specific for bananas... So if they leave early, they lose their passport...So most stay

for the 3 to 6 months. It's just to get their passport, if not, some of them would leave earlier.

Beyond this industry-wide practice, in general plantation owners can be seen to be pushing much of the responsibility for stabilizing the workforce onto managers. However, many participants in this study (including both managers and workers) noted how some owners are much more present and visible on farms than in the past, and more active in directly overseeing workers and interacting with management on a day-to-day basis. Some even pointed out the fact that owners are increasingly seen in work clothes in the fields, and taking a more hands-on approach to training and instruction. Many workers described this behaviour in a positive light, suggesting that it showed a degree of concern about the conditions of the workers and a degree of humility, by not placing themselves above the hard and dirty physical labour of plantation work. In general, this seemed to make both workers and managers feel assured that the owners understand the intricacies and laboriousness of their tasks and thereby serve to reduce perceptions about the relations of hierarchy and power.

Some owners have also sought to incentivize their workforce in creative ways. For instance, some have pitted management teams into informal fun competitions with one another over who can oversee the production of the largest quantity of the highest quality bananas, though with little more than pride and prestige at stake. In a similar vein, some managers then convey this sense of competition onto workers, in ways that seemingly seek to obscure class hierarchies and instead foster a collective sense of teams competing against one another.

The building of teamwork and camaraderie was a powerful theme. Another way this could be seen was in the increasing participation of managers in manual labour, often even working overtime, in order to help cope with the added time-pressures associated with the quality control expectations. This of course brings greater socialization, and regardless of whether this is strategically motivated or leads to sincere friendships (indications of both could be seen), it did seem to have had some role in reducing how power differences are perceived and some of the negative associations about new work disciplines. One manager encapsulates this general approach very well:

In terms of work dynamics, everybody needs to work as a team, because everyone pays for the mistake. I try to talk with the people so they are happy. They work hard, and the reason why is because when they work hard and carefully, they get more money. So we all need to work at this together. So I try to keep them getting lots of bunches.

The spirit of teamwork was also partly forged, whether consciously or unconsciously, by defining allegiance in the negative sense: that is, by cultivating a perception of a common enemy, as Fyffes was often made the butt of jokes by both managers and workers. Often those managers who socialized and participated more with their team of workers lived in the same village or camp, and were able to manage less through penalties and more through moral suasion, whereas managers who were more socially distant from their work teams had to generally establish stricter cultures of policing. There were also a few cases of managers making serious personal sacrifices to support their work teams in difficult times. In at least one case, a manager withheld a large proportion of his own pay

when the cash flow was too weak to pay out all of the expenses, instead choosing to ensure workers could receive the share of the wages owed to them.¹⁹

Another approach that was used to build a sense of community – and conceivably to soften how workers perceive the class differences in the industry – was to organize periodic celebrations. For instance, one manager described how “every Christmas, he [the plantation owner] has a party for the families,” where “he brings the food and the drinks and we sometimes get a bonus depending on how long we’ve worked there. He brings toys for the kids. He’s also given scholarships to the secretaries to go to school. Also, he runs a workers day in May with a party and food.” This manager went on to suggest that such efforts have greatly diminished conflicts with workers, though the causality is clearly hard to establish with any certainty. What did seem evident was that the general culture on some plantations was much more conducive to such approaches than on others, and events like these weren’t held on farms where the worker-management-owner relations were tenser.

Some owners and managers have made conscious efforts to improve the working environment for women in an effort to better retain trained workers, which is especially important since women have central roles in the packaging process (the division of plantation labour is highly gendered, with men generally predominant on the fields and women in the packaging sheds). This has included improved maternity rights, and holding jobs for pregnant women instead of simply replacing them. One woman noted how she was “pregnant and still here working, but this gringo lets me take two months

¹⁹ There were also a few cases where managers drew members of their work teams into illicit acts, stealing from the plantation and then sharing some of the rewards. In one case, this involved stealing bunches of bananas and smuggling them out for sale through alternative channels, and in another case a few managers were caught forging the payroll to include fictitious workers and then pocketing the extra money and distributing a portion.

off when I have the baby and he guarantees me the job back,” which she contrasted with “the other gringo on the other side,” referring to a neighbouring farm in Belize. Also, one woman had been promoted from packing shed labour to a packing shed manager, which was a position that had previously been given to men. Although this was not a widespread occurrence, at that farm it certainly showed the other women that a promotion to leadership could be possible, and may have served to motivate them to be committed and work diligently. Many women in the packing shed related that it was easier communicating with her, and that they felt she usually had their best interests in mind when they raised complaints.

New practices of selecting and training some workers for future managerial positions – including a few women – were another way that the divide between managers and workers was being slightly blurred, as managers had tended to be drawn from different social classes in the past.²⁰ The prospect of promotion was understood by workers as a means to keeping the most disciplined workers around, especially those who are first generation Belizean with parents who had immigrated and found work on the plantations. One worker noted how he was told by managers “that maybe they’ll make another position for another captain, and...they could maybe take me they say.” He then went on to describe how “it’s better that the people here get to climb higher. So they give us the motivation that there could be a captain job, and it keeps us going and trying.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that several managers in the past were recruited from neighbouring Honduras and Guatemala, having been targeted for their experience managing on banana plantations there and their knowledge of how to mold a disciplined and efficient workforce. They were very favourable because of their capacity to speak Spanish and better understand the language and culture of a largely Hispanic workforce.

Keeps us working hard and learning lots, and then we can hope that we get the opportunity.”

The prospect of moving up also aligns nicely with the desire to foster a competitive team ethos noted earlier. However, it can also be a double-edged sword, because managerial positions are few and ascension is rare, which leads some workers to feel that they are being discriminated against. Perceptions of discrimination are made worse by the history of racism and ethnic marginalization in the south of Belize, particularly towards the indigenous Mayan population, which suffers from high levels of poverty. For instance, one long-time worker from the Kek Chi (Mayan) community pointed out how the freshly inserted captain of his team “has no experience,” and that racism explains why someone like him will always be overlooked, before expressing a deep sense of resignation: “So it doesn’t make sense we fight to get up to a manager position. It’s not ours it never will be. They’ll never train me, it’s not fair.” This kind of perspective was particularly common amongst the Belizean Mayans, who represented a very small minority of the workforce.

While many of the approaches to retaining qualified workers might be seen as different ‘carrots’, there were also proverbial ‘sticks’ at hand. On a few plantations, sometimes a portion of owed wages to workers was withheld or whole paychecks were delayed, which some workers believed was a means to keep them around indefinitely.²¹

With tears welling up in his eyes, one worker described how regular delays in receiving

²¹ When owners and managers were confronted about this issue, they gave a variety of reasons why their cash flow was inconsistent, from banking problems to unpaid accounts to low production, along with assurances that better production and pay were ahead. Though many workers did not buy such explanations, and saw it as a deliberate way of making them feel undervalued, most felt they had little recourse other than walking away.

his wages were straining his ability to feed his young family, who basically were living paycheck-to-paycheck. His frustration was exacerbated by his sense of powerlessness to confront what he knew to be an illegal practice, noting how the Labour Organization of Belize (a government department with office branches in each district) had no real presence on banana plantations and never “come here and check at the office” to see that workers were not always “paid on time.” A number of other workers echoed this frustration, describing how the practice of delaying wages sometimes resulted in families going entire days without food. Obviously this seems like an extremely desperate tactic that might help to secure labour in the short-term but risks undercutting workforce stability in the long-term. However, as noted, the scale of poverty and unemployment in the region contribute to a generalized sense of insecurity that plantations take advantage of, and the practice of withholding wages reinforces this for many.

Yet it does push some towards breaking points that can tip in different directions, such as workers quitting and moving on or starting to organize. A number of participants described how wage delays or low pay have pushed people to increase attention to their small farms and gardens at home, either for household subsistence or (if there are surpluses or cash is needed for bills) to sell in local market. Some overt resistance was discussed, including a few organized strikes, which were explicitly targeted for harvest days when box numbers were anticipated to be high, with striking workers refusing to harvest or pack any bananas that day. This meant that many bunches that were ready for harvest went to waste, as missed harvest times means too much ripening to meet the quality standards. Some workers indicated harvest day strikes sparked improvements, including getting wages paid on time. However, they also conceded that changes were

mostly short-lived, and noted that strike leaders were fired, with owners attempting to publicly humiliate them as threats to the livelihoods of other workers, playing on the sense of team and community discussed earlier.

The prospects for increasing class allegiance and worker organization on the plantations are also inhibited by some of the enduring tensions and stereotypes that surround nationality, race, and ethnicity that persist among some of the migrants from different Central American countries, as Moberg (1997) examined, though such conflicts and rivalries seem to have lessened since the period he was describing.²² Few workers spoke of open discrimination, but some did convey a feeling of being disrespected by their peers based on their nationality. One worker, a Mayan woman from Guatemala, said that “some people don’t like us because of who we are...I get along with some of the people but the others I can’t because they don’t like me as Indian.” Such attitudes also sometimes reared up in discussions about organizing and striking. In describing the failure of a previous strike effort, one worker singled out Hondurans as not being in step with the majority of the other workers, and his reluctance to put his neck out “fighting for other groups.”

With the generalized sense of insecurity, fears of punishment, and some persistent ethnic tensions all inhibiting more coordinated forms of resistance, workers were generally responding to exploitative management tactics in more atomized ways. One very widespread response was simply to leave one plantation for another whenever conditions (like withheld pay, frustrations with management tactics of discipline, or

²² Various myths stem from the long history of violence, repression, and authoritarianism in the region, and Moberg (1997) argued that leaders of banana industry in Belize consciously manipulated these tensions as a means to helping control the workforce as it was coming to depend upon migrants in the 1980s.

piecework lost to low production or low quality production) became unbearable at a particular site, and sadly some described this as the only way they could envision exerting any control over their work environment. Many workers also regularly engaged in what Scott (1985) famously termed ‘everyday acts of resistance’. This included things like stealing bunches, over-reporting completed tasks to increase piecework wages, and failing to show up when bad weather made work more arduous, which was sometimes expressed as a way of undermining a particular owner or manager.

Yet though most workers expressed some degree of frustration with the overall conditions of work, this was rarely directed at particular owners or managers. Instead, most expressed a belief that the common enemy – shared between poorly paid workers and vastly wealthier plantation owners – was Fyffes, and its power through the contract relationship to determine quality control standards that were causing too much wastage and not adequately compensating for what these systems entail.

3.6 Conclusions

That’s why the trade laws change, to exploit somebody.

-Belizean plantation manager

While the Belizean banana industry has survived and expanded since the phase out of preferential markets, this research reveals that this new competitive niche – which might appear to be a neoliberal success story responding to trade liberalization – is in fact highly precarious. In the 1980s, as the Belizean banana industry grew, it came to depend upon the migration of workers from other Central American countries, who provided a relatively cheap but also rather transient workforce. Not only was the cost of labour partly depressed by the desperate contexts driving migration, but it was also partly

subsidized by the development assistance for rural infrastructure that was coming from the EU, which has dried up with the phase out of preferential trade in the 2000s.

The contract relationship with Fyffes, a large TNC, provided a lifeline for the Belizean banana industry beyond the era of preferential trade, establishing a higher value niche. But the power balance here is highly uneven, as Fyffes now monopolizes control over the Belizean banana exports, sets rigorous (what many in the industry would say are better described as onerous) quality control standards, and is able to source cheaper bananas from other markets, while Belizean plantations have little leverage. The power imbalance at this scale clearly influences how power imbalances play out on plantations.

The quality standards that Fyffes has imposed upon the Belizean banana industry, while providing only modest price premiums, are making conditions of production more difficult to an extent that could threaten the ability of plantation owners to reproduce the sort of workforce they need to keep meeting the standards that have been set. Plantation owners and managers are responding in a variety of ways, combining ‘soft’ efforts to build allegiance with some ‘harder’ manipulative tactics. On one hand, these seem to have been successful in inhibiting the organization of plantation workers, but worker dissatisfaction remains widespread, turnover is very high, and ‘everyday acts of resistance’ are evident.

The fact that such unstable livelihoods are both an *outcome of* and a *barrier to* competitive success in a higher value niche in the global banana trade raises deep questions about the pursuit of comparative advantage, and the growing precariousness of commodity export dependence in an age of trade liberalization.

4. “No Sir, She Was Not A Fool In The Field”: Gendered Risks and Sexual Violence in Immersed Cross-Cultural Fieldwork

(forthcoming in *The Professional Geographer*, June 2014)

Abstract

It is rare to hear about the gendered risks of fieldwork. My experiences with sexual violence with key informants forced me to assume a variety of defensive behaviours, which ran counter to the ways that scholarly discussions of methods tend to emphasize the importance of reducing distance and shifting power away from the researcher in a cross-cultural context. By considering gendered risks, I question the extent to which an idealized male researcher is still viewed as the archetype from which methods are conceptualized and practiced, and the implications are then discussed.

4.1. Introduction: The prevalence of sexual violence and its occurrence in fieldwork

Sexual violence against women and girls occurs on a massive scale around the world and is one of the most powerful ways that gender hierarchies are reflected and perpetuated, yet it is too often dismissed as a rare occurrence on the margins of society (UNESCO 2008). This is in part because statistics of assaults are always low estimations, which results from both systematic under-counting (e.g. only counting instances where the perpetrator has been charged) and because the enduring patriarchal tendency to blame and stigmatize the victim inhibits many women from coming forward. Women researchers are not immune from this wider context, though we rarely hear about the gendered risks of fieldwork.

Eva Moreno (1995; a pseudonym) presents a poignant example of both the risk of sexual violence and about the enduring tendency to blame to the victim. Upon her return from fieldwork in Kenya, where she had been raped at gun point by the field assistant she had grown to trust over several months, Moreno (1995:247) describes overhearing her supervisor say to a colleague in her anthropology department that “she must have acted like a fool in the field”. This unleashed feelings of guilt, shame, self-doubt, and self-blame for having lost control of her research agenda, not to mention her own body. The clear implication was that Moreno was not only partly responsible for the rape itself, but that she had failed to live up to what constitutes a good field researcher: someone who is largely in control. Moreno was one of the brave but few female anthropologists who spoke of sexual violence in research in the 1980s and 1990s, and her account along with a few others include clear expressions of: fear about being shamed or

accused; anxiety about losing credibility and respect within departments (in essence, that they would not be taken seriously as scholars anymore); and guilt for not being able to maintain control (Conaway 1986; Newton 1993; Gearing 1995; Moreno 1995; Huseby-Darvas 1999). This discussion has not continued since the 1990s, and has been almost entirely non-existent in geography²³.

Vanderbeck (2005: 387) aptly points out that “for many geographers, experiences ‘in the field’ constitute important parts of our professional identities, influencing both how we view ourselves as scholars and how we are viewed by colleagues.” But while fieldwork is an “essential geographic activity” (Sundberg 2003: 180), scholars often fail to discuss their methods beyond brief summaries of how they relate to research outputs (Deleyser and Karolczyk 2010). For Sundberg (2003:187-8), silence about our diverse field experiences are particularly problematic for two primary reasons: first, because it “fails to provide adequate guidance to students preparing for research, leading many to individualize and therefore conceal the challenges they encounter”; and second, “because it obscures the power relations that constitute researcher and researched, thereby masking the relationship between power, knowledge, and inequality.” As a result, she has made a strong appeal for more open discussion, particularly about the gendered nature of immersed cross-cultural research (Sundberg 2003). And now a decade later, this has yet to enliven much dialogue, and in particular, the silence about the risks of gendered

²³ This discussion in anthropology has recently been extended by Kathryn Clancy, who is surveying anthropologists about sexual harassment and violence between researchers within field camps. One very significant finding is that gendered violence is prevalent between supervisors, research assistants and graduate students. Clancy’s research could be seen to compliment this paper by revealing another way that patriarchal power structures permeate academia -- not just in cross-cultural interactions between researchers and subjects and the barriers to discussing gendered risks, but in the interactions among academics at different career stages and with power imbalances (Clancy 2013).

violence in research continues to prevail despite the fact that these risks can fundamentally affect the movement, data collection, positioning and identities of women in the field. It seems as though the patriarchal cultural taboos that widely inhibit women from speaking about threats of sexual violence are part of the relatively privileged world of academia, and this article aims to push this discussion into the open.

But, it is not enough to simply start having these conversations – it is also important to think about the need to challenge the assumptions that inhibit it from occurring. To do this, I start by briefly considering feminist contributions to methodological perspectives on immersed research, and then go on to focus on how considerations of gendered risks in cross-cultural settings complicate concerns over power hierarchies and distance, which are generally framed in terms of methodological strategies that mitigate the researcher’s elevated power and reduce the distance between researchers and participants. The discussion focuses on my experiences with sexual violence perpetrated by some key informants, and the strategies I developed in order to protect myself, to prevent further harm, and to avoid future risk. I emphasize how my defensive strategies were premised on intentionally *establishing* distance and *asserting* my power. Ultimately, I argue that having open conversations about experiences with sexual violence are not only necessary to help better prepare female researchers for the field, but also to confront still latent masculinist tendencies in the ways methods and methodological strategies are conceived, practiced, written about, and esteemed. It is important to ask critical questions about the extent to which an idealized male researcher continues to be held up as the archetype by which “good” fieldwork is conceptualized, and how this can inhibit recognition of the highly gendered nature of fieldwork

experiences and the need to plan for safe practices. This archetype will only be more fully deconstructed if we start openly discussing our gendered experiences in the field.

4.2. Immersed Research, Gender and Feminism

Since the 1960s, feminist scholars have challenged the traditional ideal of researchers as being detached and neutral, when this was in fact defined from a position of white, middle-classed and male privilege (Gearing 1995; Sundberg 2003). Not only did this exclusive positioning create partial knowledge, but the positivist goal for ostensibly detached, value-free inquiry served to implicitly reinforce power relations, particularly patriarchal and class-based forms of oppression (Haraway 1991; Rose 1997; Davies 1999). After several decades, critical feminist scholars have thoroughly debunked the idea that entirely “objective” and “neutral” fieldwork is possible, and have given rise to an increasing recognition that researchers are active agents in the process of data collection and that the nature of their interactions and power relations have an inescapable bearing on research.

For Katz (1994: 69), “fields of power ... deserve critical scrutiny in the conduct of field research. Such scrutiny raises questions such as... ‘how does the work deploy and confront power—whose power, where, and under what conditions?’”. In cross-cultural work, the researcher tends to hold a position of dominance vis-à-vis the research subject because he or she typically comes from a higher class, higher education level, and richer country, as well as being the one with the primary claim over how knowledge will be produced (Dubisch 1995; Dodson et al. 2007). Feminist methodologies are rooted in an assumption that researchers should acknowledge and try to lessen power differentials through more collaborative forms of data collection and knowledge production, like

open-ended in-depth interviews and interactive texts, and through the practice of reflexivity. Researchers should also try to reduce hierarchical distance by deeply immersing themselves in communities and establishing relationships and rapport based on mutual respect (Van Maanen 2005)²⁴.

From the late 1980s through the 1990s, conversations about immersion, power and distance extended into new considerations of researchers' sexual desires and engagement in sexual activities in the field (Whitehead and Conaway 1986; Newton 1993; Blackwood 1995; Gearing 1995; Kulick 1995; Winkelman 1999). For some, sex in the field was seen as something that tended to reinforce dominant-subordinate relations that were already present in extractive (usually temporary) research projects. That is, sex was wrapped up in the inequalities associated with patriarchy, race, and class, and extended them further (Whitehead and Conaway 1986; Morton 1995). Others, however, countered that engaging in sexual activities could serve as a means to better observe asymmetrical relations, with the idea that intimacy could help expose hidden subtleties that wouldn't otherwise be visible, and could better reveal the ways that power and relationships can affect knowledge production (Newton 1993; Wade 1993). But these conversations as embodied sexual and sexualized researchers are still limited in their considerations. The primary focus has been about questioning whether the researcher can

²⁴ It is important to emphasize that the researcher *tends to* hold a position of dominance in a cross-cultural setting. That is, cross-cultural research settings are not exclusively inhabited by poor and disenfranchised people and therefore we should not assume that the researcher will always have more power than her or his subjects. The exchange between Schoenberger (1992) and McDowell (1992) sheds light on the complexity of power hierarchies and the oversimplified assumptions about the relative privilege of the researcher, making it clear that when a researcher is interviewing someone of high social or political power, the researcher may assume a position of lower power or that power may be continually shifting within the interview context. In short, power hierarchies between the researcher and researched are neither straightforward nor static, and are based on multiple determinants of the people involved and the context itself.

or should engage in sexual relations in the field and how this control in sexual relations affects methods (Wilson 1995; Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999). Only in a few occasions has this conversation extended into discussions of the ways that the researcher is also fashioned into a sexual object in the field, and that this exists in large part beyond the researcher's control (Ortner 1996). This is despite the fact that there are indications in the literature that this kind of sexual objectification and victimization occurs in the field.

For example, Anna Tsing is a highly-respected and experienced female ethnographer, and she provides a telling glimpse into the sorts of routine sexual harassment, threats, and fears that women field researchers can face:

“... crammed into the cab with the crew behind a windshield covered with stickers of busty naked ladies and my male Meratus friends stuck in the back with the water buffalo, fear hits me like an avalanche. Within 30 seconds, they are feeling my arms and legs and breasts, and I must concentrate on how to get them to let me off at the next crossroads, where I heave a sigh of relief that I made it out, again, this time” (Tsing 2005: 39).

Gifford and Hall-Clifford (2008) give another account of a narrow escape from a cab in a situation in which she is nearly kidnapped. Huseby-Darvas (1999: 155) tells of her experiences with a key informant in a political position that publicly exerts his power by flirting with her in front of large groups, and speaks of occasions where she has to be sure nothing “unbefitting” happens to her in male-dominated landscapes. Ortner (1996) describes a perception amongst Sherpas of the Himalayas that white women will initiate sex, with Sherpas known to make harassing comments as a result of this expectation.

These sorts of experiences suggest that gender inequalities permeate field relations and add a great deal of complexity to cross-cultural power hierarchies. In short, whereas hierarchies in cross-cultural research tend to be framed in terms of the power differentials associated with class, race, language and education, this focus too often fails to explicitly consider how gender and gendered risks interact with and problematize these dynamics. Male researchers working in cross-cultural settings tend to have elevated status, or what might be considered the “cultural ‘ego’” because of dominating patriarchal structures and biases (Newton 1993: 8). On the other hand, female researchers in cross-cultural settings, even where they have the same cultural and class position as their male counterparts, are exposed to greater risks which can seriously constrain their movement – both in terms of time and space – and limit the nature of experiences and interactions. Indeed, it is possible that gender alone can put female field researchers in subordinate positions relative to men, in a way that effectively trumps their cultural power (Dubisch 1995). If this is the case, is it right to assume that there is necessarily power to be shifted away from female researchers, and that they should inherently be trying to reduce distance with participants in the communities they work?²⁵

4.3. Relationships with key informants and problematizing “successful” immersion

²⁵ The scope of this conversation has heteronormative tendencies, and it is important to acknowledge conversations about performing gender here. In particular, I am not trying to emphasize that my experiences with sexual violence occurred because I am an “appropriately female” woman, nor by extension that the “appropriately male” researcher would not experience any risk. However, I hold strongly that it is important in this case to emphasize gender difference, albeit in a simplified dualism, because women –as a diverse category– are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. The fact that this gendered inequality has recently been termed an ‘epidemic’ by the World Health Organization (2013) reinforces why it is important to maintain gender categories so as not to diminish the very severe risk women face, while also keeping in mind that gender is in some part performed so as to avoid reinforcing doing gender “right” as per Vanderbeck’s (2005) concerns.

Between 2009 and 2012, I conducted over 9 months of immersed field research in rural areas in the Caribbean region, working mostly alone with the exception of portions of a two week period when I hired a translator for interviews with people who spoke no English, Spanish or French. My work was based on informal conversational interviews, participant observation and over 200 in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Like most field researchers, my relationships with key informants were fundamental to my data collection and they played a crucial role in developing rapport with a wider range of participants, facilitating my immersion into communities, and aiding with diverse sampling procedures (Gilchrist 1999). The importance of key informants to field research is such that scholars have sometimes reported on the quality and closeness of these relationships as part of the process of demonstrating the validity and credibility of their study (Wilson 1995; Bell 1999; Vanderbeck 2005), and this is why methods courses and texts are filled with strategies for ways to form and maintain trusting and respectful relationships. For instance, Bogdewic (1999) advises researchers to be unassuming and play down their expertise, at the same time as being self-revealing, in order to enhance the prospect of being accepted. In other words, researchers are told to offer themselves in ways that reduce the power hierarchy and decrease distance in order to make others feel comfortable around them, and this is seen as a central part of the research process. Indeed, the failure to form strong bonds or the need to abandon relationships that turn sour can be very consequential and mean re-orienting whole research agendas.

However, what is very rarely discussed is that by entrusting people to assist in the process of immersion and ultimately collecting data, female researchers can put

themselves in vulnerable positions in which they must constantly assess the balance between their personal safety and rich data collection. As Bell (1999: 78) aptly points out, “...the process of selecting [key informants] is not a one-way procedure,” as researchers face risks of being misunderstood, misled or even intentionally deceived by key informants. These risks – in particular the potential for key informants to abuse the trust placed in them – are gendered. Yet while discussions of methods might urge caution over the ways that relationships with key informants can mislead the process of data collection (e.g. through bias, conflicts of interest, personal or group representation, a desire to impress, and shock-value story telling), it is much less common to hear frank discussions about how male informants can manipulate these relationships in ways that put female researchers in vulnerable positions.

In my experience, a number of key informants who had a central role facilitating my research and community immersion later engaged in various forms of harassment like unwanted touching, and some even sought to redeem their help with aggressive demands for sexual favours. For instance, one key informant was initially very helpful in getting me established in a community and connecting me with hard to reach subjects, but after some time I learned that he had begun spreading rumours with vivid detail about the sex I was giving him as “payback” for these research favours. Another key informant facilitated meetings for me by calling subsequent subjects, which seemed beneficial for me at first since it returned more scheduled meetings than did my own cold calls, but I later found out that instead of telling the new subjects about my research, as we had agreed, he was describing me physically – which seemed to be the real key in gaining access to these meetings. Like Gearing (1999), I received repeated warnings from key

informants that I would be particularly vulnerable in certain settings, which on one hand may have helped me navigate risks (e.g. restricting my movement alone, being cautious of movement when I was accompanied) but on the other hand made me more reliant on my key informants. Not unlike other women in immersed cross-cultural research, I often felt fashioned into a sexual object, and felt positioned by the desires of others (Moore 1993; Gearing 1995; Moreno 1995; Morton 1995; Hapke and Ayyankaril 2001; Cupples 2002; Cupples and Kindon 2003; Malam 2004; Pini 2004).

A more violent example of these gendered dynamics occurred during the initial phases of my first field season, with a man who epitomized the description of a key informant. He was highly involved and interested in the subjects I was studying, had great community connections, seemed trustworthy and generous with his time, and was willing to offer me opportunities of deep participant observation. After a few weeks of getting to know him, he cornered me and demanded oral sex as he undressed. When I refused, he angrily insulted me as I raced away, which involved hitch hiking to the nearest town. Then, in the course of this escape, the driver began touching me, forcing me to flee yet again. On another occasion, a valuable key informant who I thought was helping introduce me to a new region for my work suddenly grabbed me – out in the open but with no one around – and began forcefully kissing me. In the case of both assaults, I was forced to abandon research in these communities, in the first instance, leaving most of my things behind, and in the second case leaving as soon as it was possible do to the increasing threat this man posed.

Although my experiences with key informants were the most severe and had the greatest effects on my overall research agenda, they did not exist in isolation from

chronic harassment. This included a few physical altercations where I had to flee after being grabbed in the streets as well as regular verbal propositions, crass cat-calling, sexual text messages sent to my phone (both from numbers I recognized and others I didn't), and men taking pictures of me in the streets and even through the slats in my windows.

Ultimately, the combination of harassment and perpetrated assaults forced me to develop a number of defensive strategies that stood in seeming contrast to feminist concerns with reducing distance and power. For instance, I recruited children or local women to come with me when possible, which may have reduced the sense of intimacy participants felt and thereby increased my distance as a researcher. I also sought to conduct interviews in very public spaces, a practice that was not ideal for privacy but was necessary to increase my sense of safety. My calculation was simple: while increased visibility and proximity to others may have made key informants and subjects less willing to talk about certain sensitive issues, it also meant that they were less likely to harass me. Another strategy was to play up my education and research goals in an attempt to make male key informants or participants realize that I had only instrumental goals in my work in the community and was not interested in any sort of sexual relations. This was a particularly uncomfortable tactic, as it felt like an expressed attempt to assert my elevated cultural and class position in a way that would override my gender subordination. Although I cannot assess the extent to which I might have intellectually intimidated anyone, this attempt to shift the power dynamics does clearly stand at odds with the general aspirations of the cross-cultural feminist politic. Finally, I also increased my physical distance from research participants by making decisions about where to live that

were based on safety concerns rather than goals of immersion, which meant that my living arrangements, though far from luxurious, might have been considered relatively more expensive and desirable than those I would have otherwise chosen and may have accentuated class differences in the research relations still further. In the end, I should note that my strategies to enhance my personal safety only worked to varying degrees, and were generally less effective with men in positions of power.

I made other adaptations, such as dressing and acting in more masculine ways without isolating myself from a few close female friends I grew to depend on. I ate at the same home restaurant daily and arranged a safety plan in case I didn't check in or missed a meal. I always carried my backpack (even if I had nothing to bring with me) so that I could put it on my lap while riding in pickup trucks with men because it seemed to make it harder for them to touch me. I wore a ring on my wedding finger and spoke often about my partner who was coming to visit or who was currently visiting (a lie). Although my supervisor and department briefed me on the potential gendered risks, these were all spontaneous adaptations that I could have only determined within the field because their appropriateness was based on the context. It is important to be cautious and prepared in advance, while also being able to make adaptations on the spur of the moment. Keeping a journal about my strategies became very important to me, in order to remind myself of my strength and provide an outlet for my frustration. Finally, on a few occasions when I felt overwhelmed, I took short breaks to tourist areas where I could get some relief from the stress of the field.

4.4. Towards a gendered conception of positionality and power in research

My goal in discussing these research experiences is to illustrate how there can be times when female researchers have to *establish* distance and *leverage* cultural power, rather than striving to reduce them, in order to remain safe. The broader implication is that risks of sexual violence can fundamentally problematize the laudable goal of shifting power from the researcher to the researched (Nast 1994), making this more complex than a one-directional redistribution. In my view, there is a danger of emphasizing the redistribution of power towards the research subject in a way that implicitly assumes the culturally dominant male positionality, when female researchers have more complex and difficult power hierarchies to navigate. It is simplistic and indeed patriarchal to assume that the researcher will have the most power in the research process.

To be clear, none of this discussion is to deny the importance of considering power and distance where research is conducted in cross-cultural settings – of course field researchers should always navigate their cultural and class positions with care and strive to contribute to meaningful research to pressing social problems. However, in doing so it is important to be mindful of all the ways that these power structures are created and shifting (Katz 1994; Ortobals and Rincker 2009). By sharing my experiences with sexual violence in the field I hope to have shown the gravity of these gendered risks, and draw attention to how they can affect data collection, movement, and the capacity to maintain community immersion. The lack of a sustained discussion on gendered risks in the field made me feel, for a time, like I should keep quiet and conform, thereby exacerbating my initial feelings of shame and stigmatization that are common to many victims of sexual violence. This also put me on the defensive about the strategies I developed in order to enhance my own safety, when my real focus should only have been

to consider their potential effects—both positive and negative—on data collection (Vanderbeck 2005; Hopkins and Noble 2009). Often when I did play up my cultural and class position, the significance of gender was reduced and data collection proceeded better, and free of overt demonstrations of masculinity.

Throughout the course of my research I felt constantly entrapped in a trade-off between collecting optimal data and maximizing my safety, but over time I have come to a firm belief that this is not necessarily a compromise or a weakness in my research methods. But even further than this, I think it is important to recognize that such a perspective has roots in a disciplinary culture that continues to be implicitly premised upon an idealized male positionality immune from gendered safety risks.

Ultimately, the collection of data in field research depends on a range of variables at play between researchers and participants, not all of which can be anticipated or known (Ortbals and Rincker 2009). Thus, it is not always clear how best to optimize the conditions for data collection, and as Schoenberger (1992) admitted, she was often unclear about how her gender specifically affected the context of the interview and the quality of the data collected. Amidst this complexity, discussions of research methods inevitably leave some things out, and can resort to certain tropes. One of the most fundamental of these, I have argued, is the tendency to assume male positionality as the normative basis for good field research, with one important implication being the rarity with which risks of sexual violence are discussed. This failure to discuss a fundamental aspect of the gendered context of field research can in turn make female positionality seem to be weaker-than and the ensuing work less credible (Moreno 1995; Conaway 1986), leaving the female field researcher to individualize and internalize her problems

(Sundberg 2003) just as victims of sexual violence are often made to feel stigmatized and blameworthy. Thus, it is essential to have open discussions about sexual violence in order to show that gendered risks are not “one woman’s account of a singular act,” but “rather [are] a singular woman’s account of an experience many women have as part of their everyday lives” (Moss 1995: 447). Beyond this, as female scholars, if we began to acknowledge our strength and resilience under difficult gendered conditions we could begin to share strategies, celebrate our agency, and ultimately enhance our abilities to navigate these challenges.

Although most female scholars are relatively privileged in relation to their participants in many ways, they are not removed from the world of gender-based violence. Gendered risks create some inevitable constraints on how research gets done, and demands certain responses, but this most assuredly does not preclude women from being equally successful field researchers. While we will never find a strategic blueprint for dealing with risks, given how diverse field experiences and women themselves are, I do hope that the sort of dialogue I am proposing could help women feel less isolated and more assured that necessary responses to risks in the field are not fatally compromising the ultimate rigour of our research. Moving forward, we must continue to ask critical questions about the ways that both male and female scholars are constructing, managing and writing about methods, and the extent to which these either perpetuate or confront patriarchal assumptions about what is defined as ideal. Some of the problematic assumptions about the nature of research and research relationships emerge from feminist calls for trust, reciprocity, connection and closeness in fieldwork, which means we need

to not only challenge classic masculinist assumptions about fieldwork but also to acknowledge the limitations of some feminist assumptions too.

5. Conclusion: Contributions, and future directions in agrarian political economy and feminist methodologies

When I began my dissertation, my original research design was premised upon a comparative case study about the changing social relations of production in two small countries that were highly dependent on a particular agro-export commodity: bananas. As should be clear, this research orientation did not waver, though the way I pursued it had to evolve somewhat from my initial plans. The first part of this concluding chapter focuses on the major contributions of my work on agrarian change in the Caribbean.

The second part of this chapter then turns to my methodological contribution, which I did not at all anticipate, and emerged out of my experiences in the field and the gendered risks I faced as a solitary female researcher. In centering this contribution in the conclusion, I want to emphasize that discussions about the experience of research itself are not peripheral to the “real data”, as they are so often made to appear. Instead, I hope to highlight why this subject warrants much more attention in ethnographic research than it has previously received, especially in cross-cultural contexts.

5.1. Commodity Dependence, Liberalization, and Agrarian Change: Contributions and Future Research

The primary focus of my dissertation was on the enduring problems of tropical commodity dependence. This includes: a preponderance of low-wage plantation work and low-value markets for small farmers; volatile demand and foreign exchange earnings; the unequal power within commodity chains (and the concentration of wealth at later stages); and the vulnerability of food security as large areas of the most fertile land are

devoted to exports. This dependence continues to affect development prospects in many countries the Global South (UNCTAD 2009).

It would be impossible for one project to assess all of these issues, but my essential goal was to understand some of the ways that the problems associated with commodity dependence are worsening in the context of neoliberalism, and in particular the institutionalization of trade liberalization. The liberalization of agricultural markets has been a major source of contention at the WTO (Bello 2009; Weis 2007a), particularly for countries with narrow commodity dependence, because it risks accelerating the proverbial “race to the bottom”, in which lower-cost producers tend to triumph through such things as lowered labour or environmental standards.

These issues drew a fair bit of attention and controversy in the case of the ‘Banana Wars’ as the successful challenge to the EU-ACP preferential trade regime at WTO was forecast to dramatically affect countries in the ACP group who had long benefitted from the stabilized earnings it brought. As the case played out in the WTO through multiple appeals and eventual implementation, much of the scholarship and policy papers focussed on the macro-scale context (Josling and Taylor 2003, Myers 2004, Anania 2004). My belief was that local level research could help to understand these impacts – and in turn help to ground ‘big picture’ dynamics like trade liberalization in a real world context – by examining the process of restructuring in a way that centered on the perspectives of small farmers and farm workers, managers and owners. By examining the divergent responses to liberalization in Dominica and Belize, I hoped that I could shed light on some of the human dimensions of trade liberalization and the intensifying struggle to compete that it entails. In the end, I think my research has accomplished this,

as it reveals lots of diverse outcomes, not all of them obvious or expected, including some surprising impacts that might otherwise have remained “hidden” at the local level while most attention centers on national level export booms and busts.

One of the central contributions of my research was to shed light on the underbelly of the high quality niche banana export system in Belize and the Fair Trade response in Dominica. Although the productive systems, trading networks, and export outcomes are very different in these cases, a number of common themes can be seen. In this conclusion, I focus much more on the commonalities than the differences between the cases, because it helps to emphasize how trade liberalization does not simply mean greater pressure to compete at low costs, but also entails a series of other disciplines, and together this is straining agrarian livelihoods.

In both Dominica and Belize, producers overwhelmingly expressed a determination to continue pursuing banana exports following the collapse of preferential trade, even in the face of declining returns. This undoubtedly relates in considerable measure to the marginal position of these countries in the international division of labour (McMichael 2012), and associated political, economic, infrastructural, and even cultural legacies. In describing the nature of commodity dependence, several participants in both countries spoke metaphorically about the heavy chains of colonialism, though many also made it clear that they felt they had few if any other realistic alternatives. Thus, inertia is both historical and a product of a widespread recognition that in an era of trade liberalization countries must try to find a comparative advantage, whether they like it or not.

While the marketing systems for bananas are very different between Belize, where a large TNC dominates, and Dominica, where a Fair Trade network had emerged, there were in fact some surprising and noteworthy similarities. One of the most striking of these is the hierarchical nature of decision-making and information flows, which were accompanied by pressures to make rapid changes in order to avoid long periods without cash flows. Any prospect of considerable diversification would have demanded considerable resources from the state, for things like new marketing infrastructure, extension, and seeds, but this was obviously highly improbable in a neoliberal era of state debt and government budget cuts. Even for Belizean plantations, where access to credit is more feasible, the risks of diversifying were very forbidding to planters, due to the heavy upfront costs associated with dismantling existing infrastructure and operating at a loss for an extended period of time. The net result was that the vast majority believed that the least risky option was to engage in efforts to cut costs and/or increase quality: for plantations, by manipulating labourers and scaling-up production in new ways and for small farmers, by exploiting themselves through longer days. For many, it is not too much to say that these were seen to be the only realistic options.

Although the nature of plantation work and small farming are extremely different in many ways, I was struck by how many participants in both realms expressed a sense that their livelihoods were being degraded into a fight for survival, sometimes contrasting this with a sense of diminished pride and dignity. In Belize, many of the banana workers who had historically worked in the industry spoke fondly of past times, recounting stories of romance, songs, general camaraderie, and even the general routine when the bus used to pick them up in the village at sunrise and drop them back off at home at night. Today,

in contrast, the labour force on Belizean plantations is largely made up of increasingly desperate migrants and immigrants, who are in large part segregated from Belizean society. In Dominica, the vast majority of the farmers I spoke with had become extremely disillusioned by the nature of the Fair Trade system, seeing little benefits while the burden of increasing standards was increasing their working hours.

In both cases, negative attitudes about farming and farm-work raise serious questions about the future of production. In Belize, the farmworkers I spoke with expressed similar hopes that their children would not follow their footsteps. Although many young migrants felt compelled to follow their parents onto plantations, owing to a lack of other opportunities and a need to make money for the family, even the poorest always expressed the goal of saving their pay, heading to school, and ‘bettering themselves’. Plantation work was very much seen as a young man’s temporary job, work that certainly no young Belizean nationals wanted in spite of the fact that these districts were plagued by some of the highest levels of unemployment in the country. One young girl told me how she tried to keep her job at the plantation a secret from her friends at school to avoid being teased. In Dominica, almost all of the farmers I interviewed described how they did not want their children to work at their farms. One participant even told me how he was making a conscious effort to ‘better’ his son by exposing him to other jobs and getting him to shadow friends at their workplaces, though the boy happened to enjoy farm work, and described feeling desperate that his son would hold onto dreams of inheriting his banana fields.

Because of the widespread undesirability of small farming and farm work, banana production in both cases is becoming increasingly reliant on migrants. This dynamic is

more obvious in Belize, as I have discussed in this dissertation, with migrants largely fleeing conditions of poverty and violence in neighbouring Central American countries. On a much smaller scale, I also witnessed how a few larger farms in Dominica were employing Haitian refugees as farmhands, who (I learned from conversations) had set sail in small boats hoping to land anywhere to escape the poverty of their homeland. With limited skills and rights, these refugees were eager to take low-paying work on banana farms, which benefitted the opportunistic Dominican farm owners who were struggling to keep enough workers to maintain the more labour-intensive and careful production of Fair Trade.

In short, the pressures to reduce labour costs in banana production are intersecting with poverty and displacement occurring elsewhere in the region, at a small scale in Dominica and as the very foundation of the banana labour force in Belize, enabling the expansion of the industry there. However, even where migrant labour is driven by contexts of severe poverty and desperation, there are still limits to the degrees that this labour force can continue to be exploited over the long-term, while local residents are pushed out of agriculture altogether. Here, my research clearly indicates how various new measures that are part of the struggle to compete in new markets are producing growing tensions among both small farmers in Dominica and plantation workers in Belize. In other words, the new disciplines of both the Fair Trade network in Dominica and the Fyffes-dominated trading system in Belize are so severe that they could well risk the implosion of future banana production in both cases. For the time being, the survival of banana production might be seen to rest upon a host of hidden costs.

In Belize, rising export volumes might suggest that there has been a successful response to liberalization, with producers enhancing their efficiency in ways that have made them more competitive, but my research shows how it is much less rosy and much more precarious than that. In Dominica, though the rise of Fair Trade has come with promises that it might help to foster a more sustainable and socially just productive sector, my research indicates that it appears to be, at least for now, perpetuating many of the problems of commodity dependence including distant, top-down control, while making certain matters (e.g. production standards) more onerous for farmers.

On a global scale, it is irrelevant whether either Dominica or Belize continue to produce bananas. And indeed many other ACP countries have already stopped exporting bananas since the erosion of the EU-ACP protected market. During preferences, more than 25 ACP countries were earning foreign exchange from banana production; now almost all of these countries have been out-competed and only 3 ACP countries produce over 90% of the net ACP banana exports (FAOSTAT 2012). According to the logic of comparative advantage, it is natural and necessary for less efficient producers to be pushed out and into something else they might be competitive in. But in reality, the matter of displacing a major commodity and diversifying into something else are far more complicated and destabilizing for developing countries whose economies have been constructed to focus on a few things.

The lack of value and decision-making at the bottom of the commodity chains is reflected in widespread feelings of disenfranchisement that recurred time and again throughout the course of my research. The human face of trade liberalization, which I sought to shed light on, was farmers and farm workers, managers and owners facing

intensified pressures, and it is implausible to think that whatever economic efficiencies might be achieved, that this could ever lead to poverty reduction and equitable development in the Global South. As one participant, a Belizean manager, put it: trade liberalization is “a disadvantage for small, developing countries ...we are out here to the dogs, we have to face reality and that’s it.”

But while the broader structural context might be forbidding, I also firmly believe that we must take agency seriously, however bounded it might be. That is, small farmers and farm workers are not merely exploitable objects within uneven landscapes and trade relations, they are also active subject agents who can mobilize to varying extents within and against the conditions they face (Slocum 2006; Frank 2005; Moberg 1997). While feelings of desperation were a cross-cutting theme throughout my research, there were some hopeful seams too, such as the ways that small farmers in Dominica were building small-scale regional cooperatives and farmer-to-farmer field schools focused upon diversification and increased orientation towards local markets, and the ways that farm workers in Belize were beginning to organize and expand relatively profitable local markets for the produce from their *milpas* (small, family-run farms) in order to abandon waged labour on the plantations by developing their own means of making a livelihood. Such grassroots struggles are important subjects that were beyond the scope of my research, but would be valuable lines of future research.

5.2. The Gendered Nature of Field Research: Contributions and Future Research Possibilities

I struggled for almost two years with a tendency to downplay how gendered risks affected the process of my research for a combination of reasons. I was avoiding the pain and frustration, I felt overwhelmed by a sense of how this is a stigmatized subject, and I struggled with how it seemed to act counter to the reasons why I had set out to do this research in the first place. With respect to the latter, I repeatedly questioned myself, and felt guilty about diverting in any way from my purpose of understanding and helping shed light on the challenges facing vulnerable small farmers and farmworkers. I frequently felt that to focus at all on my experiences, and the chronic harassment and episodic threats of violence I faced, would be counter to my politics and commitments.

But eventually I began to dig into the literature on the gendered dimensions of research, and came to feel strongly that the lack of discussion about risks of sexual violence in the field is something that warrants attention and open discussion. Over a long period of time, women and men have made much progress in creating more space for women in academia (Sundberg 2003), though considerable gendered inequalities endure, and this includes what is and is not typically discussed about the dynamics of field research. Exposing our own vulnerabilities in research, and telling stories of courage and resilience can help to prepare other female researchers and in turn ensure that they will continue to have a role doing socially and politically significant research in difficult settings. There is a need for women in all fields of research (Sundberg 2003, Huseby-Darvas 1999, Moreno 1995), which means that there is a need to talk openly about some of the barriers that exist in order to find ways of overcoming them, so that we can get to a point where women feel as competent and assured of their practice in the field as our male counterparts.

The central contribution of Chapter 4 is to break the silence that surrounds the gendered risks of research, and spark conversations that have rarely been breached in geography and that have largely been abandoned in anthropology since the 1990s. In this, it provides a critique of some of the limits of feminist methods in practice. At the same time as the literature on feminist methods has paid little attention to gendered risks of sexual violence, it has frequently emphasized objectives like ‘reducing distance’ and ‘maintaining closeness’ as conditions that strengthen the quality of research-- yet the reality of the former can immensely complicate such aspirations. At many times, I found myself consciously establishing distance, and asserting certain forms of social power I possessed in order to protect myself or re-establish my sense of safety. So while I acknowledge the monumental contributions that feminist theorists have made in drawing attention to certain dynamics of power in the process of social scientific research, this has not gone far enough if it fails to recognize the deep power imbalance that inheres in the risk of sexual violence.

Already several discussions have emanated from my presentation of these arguments in various settings, and it is my hope that female scholars will deepen this discussion and elaborate strategies for women who are pursuing field research. Some of these discussions have contributed to the formation of women-led groups on gendered issues in research and in academia in two Canadian universities, as well as class discussions at the undergraduate and graduate levels on research methods. The Department of Geography at Western has also promised to integrate these issues in future workshops on preparation, safety, conduct, and coping in the field . I hope that this occurs not only in scholarly literature but in less formal discussions within departments,

from workshops to hallway conversations. No woman should ever feel ashamed or scared of failure because she had to adapt her research plans to enhance her personal safety. As these discussions reverberate into the future, it can help to reduce the stigma that still surrounds these issues, foster a culture of support, rather than judgement and change perspectives about what constitutes rigorous research – all of which are necessary to enable women to achieve their full potential within academia.

Although this subject was decidedly not what I set out to accomplish in my dissertation, I do not see it as a peripheral tangent. What drew me to want to do development research in the first place was a desire to critically examine exploitative social relations, and through this denaturalize some of ways that inequalities at the local scale are influenced by political economic change at much wider scales. I maintained this commitment through my research, and was able to learn a tremendous amount about the uneven playing field of banana production in the context of trade liberalization from the farmers, plantation workers, and other participants I interviewed. But the challenges I faced along the way made it impossible for me to ignore another deep social inequality, the threat of sexual violence, which women continue to face on a colossal scale around the world. Our position as researchers does not insulate us from this threat, and if female scholars begin to discuss it more openly it will only enhance our capacity to do meaningful grounded research that might ultimately affect social change.

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Appendix

A.1 NMREB Approval for Dominica Field Season



Office of Research Ethics

The University of Western Ontario
Room 4180 Support Services Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 5C1
Telephone: (519) 661-3036 Fax: (519) 850-2466 Email: ethics@uwo.ca
Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. T. Weis

Review Number: 16123S

Review Level: Expedited

Review Date: April 15, 2009

Protocol Title: Learning from Dominican Farmers: Responses to Rapid Agrarian Change

Department and Institution: Geography, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor:

Ethics Approval Date: April 22, 2009

Expiry Date: July 31, 2009

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

A.2 NMREB Approval for Belize Field Season (1 of 3)



Office of Research Ethics

The University of Western Ontario
Room 5150 Support Services Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 3K7
Telephone: (519) 661-3036 Fax: (519) 850-2466 Email: ethics@uwo.ca
Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. T. Weis

Review Number: 17654S

Review Date: January-07-11

Review Level: Full Board

Approved Local # of Participants: 85

Protocol Title: The Enduring Problems of Tropical Commodity Dependence: A Comparative Study in Two Banana Producing Countries (Belize and Dominica)

Department and Institution: Geography, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Ethics Approval Date: March-25-11

Expiry Date: August-31-11

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol. Letter of Information and Consent.

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Ethics Approval Extension 1 (2 of 3)



Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Tony Weis
Review Number: 17654S
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 85
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: The Enduring Problems of Tropical Commodity Dependence: A Comparative Study in Two Banana Producing Countries (Belize and Dominica)
Department & Institution: Geography, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: April 28, 2011 **Expiry Date:** March 31, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Study End Date	The study end date has been extended to March 31, 2012 to allow for project completion.	

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Approval Extension 2 (3 of 3)



Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Tony Weis
Review Number: 17654S
Review Level: Delegated
Approved Local Adult Participants: 85
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: The Enduring Problems of Tropical Commodity Dependence: A Comparative Study in Two Banana Producing Countries (Belize and Dominica)
Department & Institution: Social Science/Geography, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: March 22, 2012 **Expiry Date:** April 30, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Study End Date	The study end date has been extended to April 30, 2012 to allow for project completion.	

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

A.3 Consent Form and Interview Schedule for Dominica Field Research

UWO Letter Head
Consent letter – to be read to Participant

Summer 2009

Hello:

I am a Masters student in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario, Canada, and I am doing research on how farmers in Dominica have been diversifying their land use and marketing strategies since banana exports began to decline in the late 1990s. I am eager to learn from farmers, and if you are willing I would like to arrange an interview with you, at a time and location that are convenient for you. I am hoping to interview roughly 30 farmers.

The interview would take about 45 minutes to an hour. The primary topics that I would like to ask you about center on:

- your land use, and what you're doing differently since the 1990s (if anything);
- your approach to marketing, and what has changed since the 1990s;
- your perception of the future of agriculture in this community and in Dominica more broadly.

If it is ok with you, I would like to tape record this interview, as well as take some handwritten notes. If you don't want to participate, that's no problem, and you can decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time.

Although I don't foresee any risks to you, all information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential, and I'm the only one who will access the information. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published.

You will not be directly compensated for your participation in this study, but I do hope to present the analysis to government officials, development organizations, and farmer organizations. Additionally, I am happy to distribute a copy of this report to all the farmers who participate, and if you wish to receive a copy you just need to provide me with your contact information.

Ultimately if you choose to participate, **I hope to learn from you and I value your insights and perceptions: you are the expert** and I am the guest, and I'm honoured to be here and to have the opportunity to speak with you.

If you have any questions about this study, I will be in Dominica until the end of July. I encourage you to contact me at *<my contact information in Dominica>*. After my departure, please contact me through *<name of key contact>* who has access to my

contact information and any additional contact information you may need regarding your rights as a research participant.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Karen Ross

CONSENT STATEMENT

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate in the interview. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Research Participant:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

-

Date: _____

Interviewer obtaining informed consent:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

You will be provided with a copy of this letter once it has been signed.

Interview Guide

* reference to pre- and post-1990s identifies the timeframe when Dominica's banana export sales (and hence farmer's stable market outlet) began to decline dramatically. Because the preferential market was phased-out over several years, a specific year cannot be identified. As such, the researcher will identify the timeframe of pre- and post- banana market collapse based on the information each farmer provides as background information.

Background Information and preliminary questions:

Name:

Gender:

Date of birth:

Length of time residing in this community:

Length of time on this land:

Ownership of land:

Length of time as farmer:

Production Patterns:

1. Do you still produce bananas?
 - If yes, in your opinion, in what year did your sales slow when the market declined? Have your sales continued to decrease since then?
 - If no, in what year did you stop producing bananas?
2. **Pre-1990s:**
 - a) Can you estimate the proportion of your land that was devoted to bananas for export? What else did you grow?
 - b) What, in your eyes, were the advantages of growing bananas?
Were you satisfied with the marketing arrangements?
Were there any disadvantages in focusing on bananas?
How did you determine what else to grow in addition to bananas?
 - c) How much time did you invest in banana production relative to the amount of time you spent producing other crops?
 - d) Were you the only farmer farming your land during the time when the banana market was good?
 - If no, who else helped you, for how many hours a week, and did you pay them?
 - Could your farm have been run without this additional labour?
 - e) If you can generalize, relative to the volume of production, would you say you used more or less fertilizer and chemicals on your bananas than on other crops?
 - f) Can you estimate how much of your household's food you produced? What are the most important crops that you grew for your own consumption?
 - g) What are the primary foods you purchase?
3. **Post- 1990s:**
 - a) What do you produce now?
 - b) How have you determined this mix of crops?
 - c) Do you spend more or less time on the farm than before?
 - d) Do you hire more or less extra labour now? Do family members spend more time

on the farm now, or less?

e) Has the volume (and costs) of fertilizers and pesticides increased or decreased?

f) Can you tell me how your land has changed since the 1990s? You know agriculture better than I do, but try to think about the soil, the pests, the pollinators, etc.

g) Do you produce more or less of the food consumed by your household now? Are there any new crops that you grow for your own consumption now which you didn't in the past?-

4. **The transition:**

a) What made you realize you had to diversify away from bananas? OR, (if still producing bananas in same quantity), why have you chosen to keep producing bananas despite the changing market conditions?

b) Given that this was a heavy banana producing area, do you remember discussions about diversification? Did anyone from within or outside your community provide guidance?

c) How fast did you change your production?

d) Can you remember how you felt? Did your family and friends feel the same way?

Marketing Strategies:

1. Pre-1990s:

a) How did you sell your bananas?

b) Was this consistent in terms of price and volume?

c) In addition to the banana exporters, where else did you sell your production?

[Probe]

d) In your eyes, did the marketing system work well for you as a farmer? Were these markets consistent in terms of price and volume? What were the key problems, if anything? Did you have a problem with spoilage?

2. Post-1990s:

a) Where do you sell your produce today? Can you estimate how much of your production goes to each outlet/trader?

b) Is there anyone who assists in the marketing of your production?

c) Are you able to sell most of what you produce? Are the prices consistent? How much of your crop spoils for lack of market?

d) Can you compare these trends to what it was like before the 1990s?

e) What do you see as the biggest problems in the system of agricultural marketing in Dominica?

g) Is there more competition in markets today than a decade ago? What crops are most affected by import competition?

3. The time of change:

a) As the volume of bananas you could sell declined, how did you seek out new markets? Did anyone from outside the community help? What role did the government play, and do you feel like it was helpful in this?

4. Do you make more money from agricultural production now or from agricultural production before 1990s? Are your sales relatively steady or more variable?

Sustainable Development:

1. Do you hope to keep farming? Please explain.

2. Do you hope your children will farm? Please explain.
3. When you look at this community:
 - are there less farmers now than there were a decade ago?
 - if so, what are they doing or where have they gone?
4. Are young people moving in to start farming in your community?
5. Do you need to keep farming to sustain your household? Would you prefer to be doing something else? If yes, why don't you do that?
Are you or family members working off-farm to gain additional income? Where do you/they work?
6. What do you see as the possibilities for agriculture in Dominica in the future? Some people suggest food security can be imported: do you agree, and is it important to you that agriculture continues?
7. Do you have a role model or a leader in your community that keeps you motivated to keep farming?
8. What needs to be changed for agriculture? If you could speak with the Minister of Agriculture in Dominica, what would you say are the most important policies to support farmers like you in the future? Do think that the future for farmers will depend upon Dominica's ability to find another large export like bananas? Why?

Cultural and Social Dimensions: Pride, Happiness and Wellbeing

1. Are you proud to be a farmer now? Why or why not?
2. What do you like about farming?
3. Were you more happy farming pre-1990s or now? Why or why not?

A.4 Consent Form and Interview Schedule for Belize Field Research

UWO Letter Head
Consent letter – to be read to Participant

Spring 2011

Hello:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Geography at the University of Western Ontario, Canada, and I am doing research on the restructuring and increasing competitiveness of Belizean banana exports. In particular, I am eager to learn from those involved in production, including farm workers, managers and owners. If you are willing I would like to arrange an interview with you, at a time and a location that is convenient for you. I am hoping to interview roughly 60 workers, 20 managers, and 5 owners. The interview should take about an hour.

If it is ok with you, I would like to tape record this interview, as well as take some handwritten notes. If you don't want to participate, that's no problem, and you can decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time.

Although I don't foresee any risks to you, all information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential, and myself, my field assistant and translator are the only ones who will access the information. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published.

You will not be directly compensated for your participation in this study, but I do hope to present the analysis to key organizations involved in the sector. Additionally, I am happy to distribute a copy of this report to anyone who participates, and if you wish to receive a copy you just need to provide me with your contact information.

Ultimately if you choose to participate, I hope to learn from you and I value your insights and perceptions: you are the expert and I am the guest, and I'm honoured to be here and to have the opportunity to speak with you.

If you have any questions about this study, I will be in Belize until the end of August. I encourage you to contact me at *<my contact information in Belize>*. After my departure, please contact me through Mrs. Sharmayne Saunders at the University of West Indies, Belize Campus, at *<inset contact information here>* who has access to my contact information and any additional contact information you may need regarding your rights as a research participant.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Karen Ross

Academic Supervisor:
Dr. Tony Weis, Associate Professor

CONSENT STATEMENT

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate in the interview. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Research Participant:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

-

Date: _____

Interviewer obtaining informed consent:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

You will be provided with a copy of this letter once it has been signed.

Interview Guide

* reference to pre- and post-1990s identifies the timeframe when ACP's preferential market began to be dismantled, and hence Belize's export market began to become more competitive. In general, participants will be asked to compare working conditions over time and in particular, to identify the most significant changes to their own working lives and environment.

FOR FARM WORKERS

*** Farm workers in Belize are predominantly migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Because of the transient nature of migrant work (and its recent introduction in Belize), it is possible that some migrants have not been working in the plantation for more than a year/a few years. However, workers will be purposively sampled to include those with a range of experience, but ensuring that I speak with those who have been working in Belize for the longest periods of time. It is impossible to understand how long this will be until I arrive. Questions have been formulated accordingly.**

Background Information and preliminary questions:

Name:

Gender:

Date of birth:

Country of origin:

Length of time residing in Belize:

Length of time working on this plantation:

Length of time that he/she is planning to stay in Belize:

Length of time as farm worker:

Previous employment:

Work as a Labourer:

1. What is it like to work on a banana plantation?

- What are your daily tasks?

2. If you've worked on other banana plantations or in other agricultural production operations, is this one different? If yes, can you explain how?

3. What training did you receive?

4. Has your work changed since you first came?

-If yes, how?

-Does this make it easier or more difficult?

5. What were your reasons for coming, and what are your reasons to continue/not continue?

-If you are not continuing, where are you going, where will you work, and why?

6. What is the best part of work? Why?

7. What is the worst part? Why?
 - Have you tried to change this?
 - Do you think it is possible for this to improve?
8. What is your wage and how many hours per week do you work?
 - Has this changed in the time you've been working?
 - How does this compare with banana plantations in your home country?
9. What do you know about the banana export market?
10. Who do you think has the greatest influence over your work, wages and production?

Life in the Plantation Community, and in Belize

1. Did you come with your family?
 - Who did you leave behind?
2. What kind of work did you do in your home country? Do you miss it?
2. How do you like living in this community?
3. What is the best part of the community?
4. What do you like least about living in this community?
5. Has life changed in the community since you've been here? If so, how?
6. Do you feel like this is this a good place for your children to grow up?
 - How does it compare to your home community?
7. Have you gained/ do you hope to gain Belizean citizenship? Why or why not?
8. Have you been outside the plantation communities to the rest of Belize? Why or why not?
9. Do you grow your own food here? If yes, what do you grow?
 - If yes, why? If no, why not?

Future

1. How much longer do you intend to stay working here? Why?
2. Do you think your children have a better future in Belize than in your home country? If so, why?
3. Why do you think Belize has been a destination for so many migrant workers?
4. Are there any ethnic tensions or national rivalries between migrant workers from different places?
 - Are there any tensions between migrants and Belizeans?
 - If yes, have these gotten better or worse over time?
5. If you could express one thing to both the plantation owner and the Ministry of Agriculture in Belize, what would they be?
6. What do you think the Ministry of Agriculture and the planter need to do to improve this experience for you in the future? Speak to one point in community life and one in the work force.
 - Which is the bigger priority for you?

FOR FARM MANAGERS

Background Information and preliminary questions:

Name:

Gender:

Date of birth:

Country/town of origin:

Length of time residing in Belize (if foreigner):

Length of time working on this plantation:

(If migrant) Length of time that he/she is planning to stay in Belize:

Length of time as manager:

Work as Plantation Manager

1. What are your principle responsibilities as manager of this banana plantation?
2. If you've worked on others or in other production operations, how is this one different?
3. What motivated you to pursue this line of work?
 - What was your training?
4. Has your work changed since you started? If yes, how?
 - Has your work become easier or more difficult?
5. What is the best part of your job? Why?
8. What is the worst part? Why?
 - Have you made any efforts to change this?
9. What are your biggest motivations in your work?
10. How would you describe your relationship with your workers?
 - Is it easier to relate to either men or women?
 - Are there any ethnic tensions or national rivalries on the farm?
11. What kinds of interactions do you have with the owner?
12. What kinds of interactions do you have with Fyffes?

Production Patterns

1. How have production and exports from this plantation performed in recent years?
 - What do you see as the major reasons for this?
2. Have increasing quality standards affected your job? If so, how?
4. Is there more wasted harvest because of this?
 - How do you control quality, and waste?
5. Have changing packaging standards affected your job? If so, how?
6. Have you ever run into issues with production/packaging in your unit?
 - If yes, what were the consequences?
7. Has the volume of fertilizers and pesticides applied changed? If so, why?
8. Has anything else changed about the process of production?
9. In your opinion and experience, does the owner or Fyffes have more control over production?
10. Has this relationship changed in recent years? If so, has it affected production on this plantation?

Future

1. In your opinion, how important is banana production to Belize's agricultural sector?
2. What are the major international competitors you face?
 - How has this competition affected Belize's banana production with the end of preferential trade?

3. Do you think this plantation can increase its production?
 - Do you think this is necessary?
 - What are the necessary changes to make this to happen?
4. In your opinion, do you think that there is a good balance between export and domestic production in Belize?
5. In your opinion, do you think that supply management amongst all banana producing countries would be effective, or is it better to compete against each other in a free market? Why?
6. In your opinion, do you think that the ACP still has a role to play in negotiating with the EU with respect to bananas, or do you think that era is over?

FOR FARM OWNERS (PLANTERS)

Background Information and preliminary questions:

Name:

Gender:

Date of birth:

Country/town of origin:

Length of time residing in Belize (if foreigner):

(If foreigner) Length of time that he/she is planning to stay in Belize:

Length of time as owner:

Implications of investment in banana production:

Implications of Investment in Banana Production

1. What was your interest in investing in banana production?
 - Why in Belize?
2. Have you been satisfied with your investment here? Why or why not?
3. What is your main role as owner on a day-to-day basis?
4. Do you plan to make any major technological investments or new investments in land for expansion?
5. What do you see as the major challenges in the banana export sector today?
 - Have these changed since the end of preferential trade? If so, how?
6. Where are your greatest competitive challenges coming from?
7. What is your relationship with Fyffes?
 - Has this changed?
8. What is most crucial to remaining competitive in banana production?
9. Do you have an active role in the Banana Grower's Association?
10. Do you have a relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture?
 - Are you happy with the role the MoA in responding to the end of preferential trade?

Production Patterns

1. Has productivity improved on this plantation?
 - If yes, since when, by how much? What are the key reasons?
 - If no, why not?
2. Do you look to competitors in other countries for models of productive efficiency?

- What do you see as the key competitive differences between large-scale operations in different countries?
- 3. Do you face challenges in recruiting your workforce?
 - If yes, why?
- 4. Do you have any problems with your workforce?
 - If yes, please describe.
- 5. Have increasing quality standards affected your workforce?
 - Have they affected your profitability?
 - What responses have you made?
- 6. Is there more wasted harvest because of these standards?
 - How do you control quality, and waste?
- 7. Have changing packaging standards posed any problems for your operation? Explain.
- 8. Has the volume of fertilizers and pesticides changed over time? If so, why?

Future

1. In your opinion, what does banana production mean for Belize's agricultural sector? Please speak to advantages and disadvantages both locally and nationally.
2. Do you think Belize can continue to expand its agricultural exports? If yes, in which crop?
 - Would you invest?
3. What fueled the change in the labour force from one dependent on Belizeans to one primarily reliant on migrant workers?
 - Can you foresee more changes?
4. Are there other market outlets beyond the EU, and other exporters beyond Fyffes, that you are considering for the future?
5. Is corporate control in export necessary for bananas? Why?
 - If no, what is the alternative?
6. In your opinion, do you think banana producing countries should manage supply, or is it better to compete against each other in a free market? Why?
7. What do you think Belize's role should be in the ACP group?
 - In your opinion, does it matter, in terms of banana production, that Belize is a member?
8. Should ACP countries coordinate to increase negotiating power with the EU, especially concerning banana markets?

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

- Ph.D. Candidate** Department of Geography, Western University (2009-Present: awaiting defence, January 2014)
- Comprehensive exams passed in July 2010; Awarded “Distinction”
(Fields: Agrarian Change & International Development, Social Movements & Agrarian Alternatives, Political Ecology & Ethnography)
- Ph.D. upgrade from M.A., Department of Geography, International Development and Agriculture, Western University (January 2010)
- B.Sc.H** Department of Biology, Environmental Biology, Queen’s University, Canada (2004-2008)
- Undergraduate thesis in Paleolimnology at Paleoecological and Environmental Assessment and Research Laboratory (P.E.A.R.L.)
- Dean’s Honour Role

AWARDS, DISTINCTIONS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 2013 | Finalist for UWO Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Award |
| 2011-2013 | SSHRC Doctoral Research Fellowship (\$40 000) |
| 2011 | Western University Graduate Thesis Research Award (\$750) |
| 2011 | “Distinction” on Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams |
| 2011 | IDRC Doctoral Research Award (\$19 645) |
| 2011 | Finalist for UWO Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Award |
| 2010 | E.G. Pleva Prize for Excellence as Graduate Teaching Assistant (\$500) |
| 2010-2011 | OGS Ph.D. Research Scholarship (\$15 000) |
| 2009-2010 | SSHRC Master’s Research Scholarship (\$18 000) |
| 2009-2010 | OGS Master’s Research Scholarship (reverted) |
| 2005-2008 | Dean’s Honour Role (Queen’s University) |
| 2007 | Student Work Experience Program at Queen’s University (\$7480) |
| 2007 | Scholarship at Center for Global Climate Change at University of Toronto |

PUBLICATIONS

- Ross, K.** Forthcoming (Accepted to *The Professional Geographer*)
“No Sir, she was not a fool in the field”: Gendered risks and sexual violence in immersed cross-cultural fieldwork

Arseneau, K.M.A., Driscoll, C.T., Brager, L.M., **Ross, K.A.** and Cumming, B.F. (2011) Recent evidence of biological recovery from acidification in the Adirondacks (New York, USA): A multiproxy paleolimnological investigation of Big Moose Lake. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Science*, 68(4): 575.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2013 | “No Sir She Was Not a Fool in the Field” <i>Canadian Association of Geographers Annual Conference</i> , St. John’s, Newfoundland |
| 2013 | “Belize’s Banana Boom and the Problem of Labour” <i>Association of American Geographers Annual Conference</i> , Los Angeles, U.S.A. |
| 2010 | “Grounding Fair Trade in the Voices of Dominica’s Small Farmers” <i>Association of American Geographers Annual Conference</i> , Washington D.C., U.S.A. |
| 2009 | “Branding Green by Growing Locally: Dominica’s Ecotourism Push and Agrarian Dilemma” <i>History in the Making 14: Space, Place and the Environment</i> , Montreal, Canada |
| 2007 | “Collective Action Towards Increasing Local Foods on Campus” <i>Greening Queen’s: Becoming Leaders in Campus Sustainability</i> , Kingston, Canada |

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2014 | Course Instructor (Fall, coming): Introduction to Social Justice and Peace Studies, SJPS 1025F, Social Justice and Peace Studies, King’s University College |
| 2014 | Course Instructor (Winter): Latin America & the Caribbean: Landscapes of Inequality GEOG 2020B, Department of Geography, UWO |

Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography, Western University:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 2013 | Geographies of Development 3442F |
| 2013 | Conservation and Development 3441G |
| 2013 | Latin America and the Caribbean: Landscapes of Inequality 2020B |
| 2012 | Geographic Research: Methods and Issues 3250A |
| 2011 | The Nature and Philosophy of Geography 4000B |
| 2011 | Africa South of the Sahara 2030B |
| 2010/2008 | Geography of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition 3445G |
| 2009/2008 | Society and Nature 1500F |

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

- English (Fluent: Speak, read, write)
- French and Spanish (Intermediate Competency: Speak, read, write)